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The Place and Meaning of Physical Culture in the Lives of Underserved Young Women in a Canadian Inner-city

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Health, Sport and Human Performance
at
The University of Waikato
by
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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2019

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore underserved young women's experiences and understandings of physical culture (Kirk, 1999). There is evidence that once young people reach the age of adolescence, patterns of participation in physical activity decline (Humbert, Chad, Burner, Spink, Muhajarine, Anderson, Girolami, Odnokon, & Gryba, 2008) and in Canada this drop is more significant for young women than young men (Wharf Higgins, Gaul, Gibbons, & Van Gyn, 2003).

While there is a growing body of research indicating that young people's experiences with physical activity are different across social, cultural and physical locations (Burrows & McCormack, 2011), the perspectives of young women who are situated in marginalized communities are rarely sought (Hill & Azzarito, 2012; Dagkas & Hunter, 2015). What is undoubtedly known about young women in marginalized communities is that they have less access and opportunities to engage in physical culture than their counterparts in affluent communities (Sabo, 2009). This research sought to make sense of this outcome by diving into the lived experiences of the young women who live in these communities, specifically an underserved community in a Canadian city. Data were collected from 6 young women between ages 12 and 18 using in-depth semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological analysis. Five key themes emerged: (1) Attitudes Towards Physical Activity (2) Supports (3) Constraints (4) Gender Discourse (5) Centrality of the Body in Physical Culture. While some findings mirrored those present in existing research literature, others suggest there are particular supports and constraints to participation that distinguish these young women's experiences in an underserved community. The neighbourhood community center emerged as a crucial support for these young women's engagement in physical activity. It is important that the programs in these kinds of spaces continue to be supported financially to provide young women with access and opportunities to physical activity. Further, policy makers and teachers must consider the wider circumstance of their lives as underserved young people and actively seek to create equitable opportunities.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I'd like to thank my academic advisor, Dr. Lisette Burrows for her support, guidance, and her sincere interest throughout my thesis. I was fortunate to have met with Lisette and discuss the thesis and then have her be willing to continue working with me long-distance (literally in different hemispheres) for the bulk of the project. Her ability to simplify something that felt like such a large daunting task, in the beginning, made the journey feel not only possible but also enjoyable. She provided me with the opportunity to pursue a meaningful topic which included my passion for physical activity, working with underserved communities, and supporting other women, and shaped it into this thesis. As a result of her advisement, I have a better understanding of the important and crucial work that needs to be done in this field, and I cannot wait to make a difference.

I would like to thank my participants for allowing me to have a moment of their summer holidays to be part of this project. This thesis was inspired by these young women. I am immensely grateful they had so much insight to offer and I look forward to using the knowledge they have given me to improve their access to physical activity.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of my friends and family, especially my dad. I am grateful that he supported a path that I consider to be my passion. I also appreciated the rides to Starbucks with him whenever I needed a break.

Lastly, I want to thank the spin instructors at the cycle studio, who reminded me each week of what I'm capable of accomplishing when I put my mind to it. Their enthusiasm and intensity gave me the motivation to tackle what seemed like endless reading and writing week after week.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore underserved (Williams, Bonnett, Jackson, & Smith, 2008) young women's experiences and understandings of physical culture (Kirk, 1999). There is evidence that once young people reach the age of adolescence, patterns of participation in physical activity decline (Humbert et al., 2008) and that Canadian adolescent females are less physically active than male youth (Wharf Higgins et al., 2003). While there is a growing body of research investigating how and when young people experience sport and physical activity, the perspectives of young women who are situated in marginalized communities are rarely sought (Hill & Azzarito, 2012; Dagkas & Hunter, 2015). As remarked by Wright and Macdonald (2010), young people's experiences with physical activity are contextual. There are social, cultural and political factors that regulate young people's opportunities to engage in physical activity. Via an interpretive phenomenology approach, I seek to understand the lived experiences of some of these young women. What is undoubtedly known about young women in marginalized communities is that they have less access and opportunities to engage in physical culture than their counterparts in suburban areas (Sabo, 2009). Young women who live in urban areas also begin sport and other recreational pursuits later in life and drop out earlier than both young women in suburban areas and the young men in their own communities (Sabo, 2009). This research seeks to make sense of this outcome by diving into the lived experiences of the young women who live in these communities, specifically an underserved community in a Canadian city.

The voices of six young women were weaved together to better understand what their lived experiences with physical culture in their underserved community. The semi-structured in-depth interviews gave these young women the opportunity to have their voices heard, an important component of feminist research (DeVault & Gross, 2012). I demonstrate that although there are similarities in the physical culture experiences of young women in the literature,

the participants of this research encounter support and constraints that are significant to their lives in an underserved neighbourhood.

Definition of Key Terms

Young women are the subjects of this research. Other overlapping words used to describe this population of interest include adolescents, youth, or teenagers. The World Health Organization (WHO) uses ‘young people’ to cover the age range between 10 and 24 years (2019) yet for the purpose of this study, I am defining youth as persons between the ages of 12 and 18. I am doing this because the community center from which the research participants were recruited considers a person to be in the ‘youth’ category if they are between the ages of 12 and 18 and this is the age band in which the participants of the ‘youth drop-in program’ are positioned.

There are psychological, sociological and developmental ways of thinking about youth as a category of people (Green, 2011). Definitions of the word ‘youth’ change over time, between and within societies, culture and location (Green, 2011). For the WHO, youth refers to a period in a young person's life within which they are experiencing transition at both the lower and upper end of the age-band. The transitions can be characterized by physiological changes and psychological changes that suggest children are transitioning into adolescents or adolescents into adulthood (Green, 2011). Young women's engagement in physical culture may be impacted by these transitions (Wright & Lavery, 2010).

Physical culture is a term popularized by Kirk (1999) to refer to the different ways corporeal discourse is mobilized via sport, physical recreation and exercise. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the term ‘physical activity’ is used as a general category term to refer to the ways young women move their bodies. Physical activities range from structured sport, to informal physical recreation and exercise or lifestyle activities. For phenomenological interviews, it is suggested that “questions be asked in the vocabulary and language of the individual being interviewed” (Benner, 1994 as cited by Bevan, 2014, p. 137). Since the participants of this research are youth, they are more likely to relate to the concept of physical activity over physical culture.

The young women in this research were recruited from one particular geographic location and are considered ‘underserved’ or ‘at-risk’ (Williams et al., 2008). The term ‘underserved’ is used to describe a group of people from a particular demographic status that is underrepresented by an agency. Characteristics of this group include a low socioeconomic status, low income, visible minority, geographic location, particular gender groups, low level of education, and a lack of English language skills to name a few (Williams et al., 2008). The term ‘at-risk’ better describes those individuals that are underserved but also exhibit behaviours that threaten the possibility of success in their futures. Characteristics that indicate an individual is at-risk includes drug use and abuse, dropping out of school, teen pregnancy, being in state-care, health issues and suicidal behaviours (Williams et al., 2008). For the purposes of this thesis I will predominantly use the term underserved for the reason that all the young women in this community are underserved but not all are at-risk.

Context of the Research

The subjects of this study are young women who reside in a community situated in a Canadian city’s central core. A city’s central core or inner-city is characterized by high population density, lower socio-economic status and lower housing costs (Turcotte, 2014). According to a World Vision Canadian Programs report (2013), the city in which the participants reside has one of the highest rates of urban poverty in the country and its child poverty rate is ranked third highest among large Canadian cities. Indigenous peoples are overrepresented among those living in poverty in this city (World Vision Canadian Programs, 2013). The harmful consequences of colonization, like intergenerational trauma, are typified and continue to be experienced by Indigenous peoples in this city’s underserved communities (Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives [CCPA], 2013). A large portion of the inner-city community is also composed of newcomers to Canada. In 2017, Canada accepted 286 000 new permanent residents and refugees into the country (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2018). The majority of these newcomers are resettled in communities that are more affordable which are those neighbourhoods in urban centers that are underserved (CCPA, 2013). Like Indigenous peoples, newcomers also experience a wide-range of stressors that

impact their quality of life as they navigate their way through a new culture and this includes and is not limited to, isolation and discrimination (Quirke, 2011).

Many of the young women in this neighbourhood are considered ‘at-risk’ and many of them find themselves accessing resources at the community center to escape their troubles (CCPA, 2013). At the local level, physical activity programs are capable of being used as a tool for improving the living conditions of victims dealing with trauma (Beutler, 2008). Unfortunately, as mentioned above, women who reside in urban areas have less access to physical activity programming than anyone else (Sabo, 2009).

Due to the increase of relocated individuals into urban centers, community-based organizations (CBO’s) are dealing with the strain of dwindling resources and shifting funding priorities. The provincial government in which the participants reside is ongoingly reviewing the value for money of the programs it funds (Smirl, 2017). Regrettably, there is more focus in the renewal of funds based on the quantitative outcomes reached rather than qualitative results, which can provide a better idea of the social value of programs aimed at improving social health and well-being, as the latter are more challenging to measure (Smirl, 2017). Even though quantitative measures are tracked, they don’t represent the full picture. As a result, CBO’s have an increasingly difficult task delivering services to the community, the quality of the programs diminishes and organizations must work harder to make the case for more funds.

CBO’s are the most predominant type of not-for-profit and voluntary based organizations in Canada and they represent the largest segment of organized sport (Dyck, 2012) at 71 percent (Misener & Doherty, 2009). As governments increasingly turn to the not-for-profit sector to distribute programs aimed at improving the quality of life of Canadians, there has been increased attention in the factors impacting the ability of not-for-profit organizations to achieve their goals. It is well researched that small, sport and recreation organizations struggle monetarily more than other types of not-for-profit organizations and depend on extensive and maintainable longstanding core funding and accessible project-based subsidies (Gumulka, Barr, Lasby & Brownlee, 2005). When core funding is inadequate these organizations grudgingly rely on short-term and irregular

funding to deliver programs for their participants. Furthermore, because the sport delivery system is the responsibility of the government, community sport organizations are susceptible to shifting political priority and cutbacks (Scott, 2003).

Young people's experiences are not uniform and are dependent on relations of power and wealth. Although young people experience many similarities such as education, the labour market and consumption, fundamental circumstances of their experiences vary (Wyn & White, 1997). One such circumstance is the division of social classes. Social stratification in societies generate diverse experiences among shared practices. The power relations that exists among divisions of social class impacts how youth interact with institutions or cultural practices like education, family, or sport and these processes result in varied interpretations of those experiences (Wyn & White, 1997). For instance, sport as a cultural practice, is experienced differently among young people dependent of the social class they are from (Coakley, 2004; Green, 2011). Although it is common for all young people to experience structured or unstructured sport and physical activity, young people who come from the upper class, are more likely to engage in and sustain participation in structured sport because their families are able to afford the fees associated with these activities that those in lower classes cannot (Coakley, 2004).

Patriarchy, an ideological system that gives male power over women legitimacy, sustains and preserves gender inequality via cultural practices like sport (Burton Nelson, 1998). Young women and young men experience physical activity differently based on their sex. Very early on, young people are socialized to engage in physical activity that is gender-appropriate (Messner, 2002; Burton Nelson, 1998). Traditionally women were excluded from sport. Eventually young women were permitted to be involved in physical activity as long as it was not demanding of their bodies, and made them appear graceful and charming (Mangan & Park, 1987). Young women's involvement in sport and physical recreation principally began in the context of their schools and community centers. However, schools and community centers functioned as sites of social control, contributing to the construction of femininity by separating males and females into programs suited to each gender (Lenskyj, 1991). Women were

prescribed physical activity programs that were limited so that they could not inherit characteristics that are categorically masculine (Lenskyj, 1991).

My Connection to the Topic

My interest in this topic came about from time I spent employed at a CBO as the coordinator of sport programs for children and youth situated in the underserved community described above. The sport program's mission was to provide barrier free sport programming for youth ages 8 to 18. The program relied on a combination of funding sources from both public and private sectors. Without these investments, organized sport would not be accessible to the young people who reside there. With the available resources, this program offered only two options if any young person desired to be engaged in organized sports at no-cost to the parents. During the winter time, youth could play basketball and during the summer time they could play soccer. Although there were equal numbers of male and female children and youth who frequented the community center, in my three years of experience in this position, the ratio of male to female participants registered in the sport programs was consistently five to one. This was a shame, and the young women who came to the center every day to see if there was something for them to do, needed a project to be a part of and to feel like they belonged.

Gratefully, the organization received funding for a one-time project with the promise of offering young women in the neighbourhood additional opportunities to engage in physical activity and leadership roles. I jumped at the opportunity to lead this project. This was a very exciting and positive opportunity for the young women in the community for a couple significant reasons.

Firstly, no program like this existed in the community. The program calendar I created was packed with all the trendy ways to be active. These activities included hot yoga, spin classes, personal training, athlete testing combines, visits from a nutrition coach and other lifestyle activities. Participants would not have to worry about constraints like transportation, equipment and fees to take part in the program. Other perks of the program were opportunities for participants to engage in physical activity in a female only space, a non-competitive environment, a variety of options, opportunities for success and an

experienced female leader. These were just some of the conditions suggested by the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport to attract and increase the participation of young women in physical activity programs (Pfaeffli, 2009).

A second reason this program was important to the community is the lack of physical activity opportunities high school students have during school hours. In 2008, the province changed its physical education policy as a response to an increase of chronic diseases and physical inactivity (McGavock, Torrance, McGuire, Wozny, & Lewanczuk, 2007). Previously, high school students in grades 11 and 12, did not have physical education classes and did not need to earn credits to be eligible to graduate. Since Fall of 2008, the physical education curriculum in this province, requires that students in grades 11 and 12 accumulate hours of physical activity outside of school hours in their last two years to earn their credits in order to graduate (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2007). This policy impacts young people between the ages of 16 to 18. This change is unrealistic for young people situated in underserved communities where the opportunities do not exist outside of school nor can their parents afford to register them in market-based physical activity programs. Unfortunately, schools are placing more importance on performativity and human capital development than the physical health and development of young people (Connell, 2013). A follow up study revealed that the policy mandating physical education in these grades, has had no effect on the moderate to vigorous physical activity levels of young people aged 16 to 18 (Hobin, Erickson, Comte, Zuo, Pasha, Murnaghan, Manske, Casey, & McGavock, 2017).

Due to time constraints and other responsibilities of the job, much to my dismay, this program was quickly designed and pedagogical considerations were neglected. Program participants did not have many opportunities to suggest program ideas. After considerable reflection, I realized that I had adopted the ‘at-risk’ discourse and engaged in a mindset reflective of neoliberal ideologies. While the program I had planned for them was well-intentioned, I was sending the message that these young women lacked the capacity to make decisions for themselves by prescribing certain physical activity for them to do. I was enabling a sort of social control by regulating how they used their physical bodies, which

would contribute to their knowledge of self-management and convincing them that their participation was going to make for a better life (Darnell, 2010). The process of prescribing, such as my actions, is reflective of an oppressor and oppressed relationship (Freire, 2015). Often, those that are oppressed, internalize the oppressor's consciousness, begin to identify with them and agree with their agenda because of a new found perception of themselves. However, that is not the case and they remain in an oppressed position (Freire, 2015). The reality for these program participants is that once the funding ran out, these girls were not be able to engage in the same activities I was promoting as lifestyles.

According to Coakley (2011), those who fund, create and deliver physical activity programs are motivated by 'wishful thinking' (p. 307). Often, programs are supported as the results of assumed developmental benefits of physical activity like healthy and productive people who stay out of trouble. Because physical activity programs have 'always' been perceived as one way to improve quality of life and a pathway to solving social problems, those who fund and create these programs often neglect the need to consider effective pedagogy (Coakley, 2011). The program focused on personal development and success, while brushing aside the real problems young people experience in their community (Darnell, 2010). I was principally, contributing to the oppression that these young women already experience during their day-to-day lives. This was not the intention of the project and I do not feel as though the project contributed to the social health, well-being and needs of the young women of this particular community.

I will forever be grateful for having had the opportunity to work in this community. I will admit I did not understand the degree of the social injustices that youth in marginalized communities encountered until I spent time with the youth and their parents, volunteer coaches, and other CBO's. As a result of this experience, I pay much more attention to the local, provincial and national politics that impact how, when and who does sport and recreation. After this project, I look forward to advocating for the young women in this neighbourhood and adjusting how I approach creating sport and physical activity programs for this particular population.

Throughout the writing of this thesis, I am cognizant of my own positioning as a young Caucasian woman of privilege when working with underserved young people, many of whom are Indigenous and or newcomers to Canada.

Significance of the Research

As mentioned before, young people's experiences with physical activity are intimately linked to context. There is a lack of research addressing how young women who reside in marginalized communities experience physical culture. Further investigation would benefit youth workers, social workers, sport coordinators, and mentors like myself, to be more knowledgeable of the role physical activity has in the lives of these young women and also to gain a better understanding of the circumstances and environments that would enable them to engage in physical activity.

Sport and physical recreation in communities can play a role in addressing social issues like gender-based discrimination (Beutler, 2008). Physical activity policies and programs, are well documented as being an effective tool for advocacy and the generation of conversation on such topics (United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force [UNIATF], 2003; Beutler, 2008). An increase of young women in sport, can help change the community's perception of the role of young women have in society.

However, there exists locally and globally, common obstacles in implementing such advancements. Some of these obstacles include a lack of priorities, resources, policies, educators, infrastructure, greater focus on talented elite athletes and gender ideologies (Coakley, 2004; Beutler, 2008). The international community recognizes that if these barriers were removed, young women especially, would experience a sense of social inclusion and empowerment (UNIATF, 2003; Beutler, 2008).

The statistics show that young women who reside in marginalized communities and are between the ages 15-29 are most likely to experience domestic violence and victimization (CCPA, 2013). This is why young women who reside in marginalized communities need spaces in their communities where they can explore their potential. Through physical activity young women have the

opportunity to practice leadership, work on their confidence and self-esteem. Their participation in physical activity pursuits allow them to meet new people and network which furthers their access to other opportunities (UNIATF, 2003).

This research is also important to help build the case for increasing support from current and potential funders. Even though policy makers and potential funders prefer ‘hard-facts’ derived from quantitative and positivistic methods to convince them of credibility for their attention and support, qualitative methods can yield deeper understandings of social events (Kay, 2009). In-depth interviews allow for rich descriptions of the social phenomenon under investigation. They allow for the participants to be reflexive of their personal experiences and also offer a space for their “authentic local voices and knowledge” to be heard (Kay, 2009, pp. 1180).

The goal of this research was to gain insight into the lived experiences that young women, who are situated in an underserved community, have with physical activity. The most appropriate method of gathering such information was to conduct in-depth interviews which allowed for detailed accounts and deeper understandings of the young women’s perspectives.

Structure of the Thesis

A review of the existing literature on underserved young women and their lived experiences with physical activity will follow. Themes and concepts common across the literature will be explored. The review goes on to locate the research that indicates how young Canadian Indigenous women and young immigrant women experience physical activity because the research was conducted in the Canadian context of an underserved community. Different methodological approaches to existing research will also be explored.

After the review of the literature, a methodology chapter will explain the choice of study design and approach. Chapter four will outline in detail the findings of the study organized in themes supported by the direct words of the participants. Chapter five will be the discussion and it will elaborate on findings that are similar to the previous findings in the literature but also focuses on findings significant to the population of interest. Odd and isolated comments will also be exhumed. The conclusion chapter will summarize key findings and

implications of the research as well as suggest further research and policy directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this review of the literature I summarize key themes of the scholarly work that exists on the topic of young women and their experiences with physical activity, with particular attention to the issues that impact young women who reside in underserved communities. I also map some of the key theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches used to inform work in this sphere and conclude by situating my own study against this backdrop of prior work.

Search strings of key words such as: 1) young women, adolescent girls, youth, teenagers, girls, 2) underserved, minority, marginalized, disadvantaged, at-risk, and 3) physical culture, physical activity, sports, physical education were used to assist my review. Journals of particular relevance included: *Sport, Education and Society*, *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, *Journal of Sport Sciences*, *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* and *Women and Health*. The sources cited range from 1996 to 2019 with a major focus on data within the 21st century given the socio-historical context of my study.

Context for the Review

In 2018 *ParticipACTION* released a report card assessing Canadian children and youth's overall physical activity levels and graded the age group of 5 to 17 years old a D+ only 35% of this group was reaching the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate to vigorous physical activity (2018). Young Canadian women in particular, are found to be significantly less physically active than males in the age range of 12 to 20 (Wharf Higgins et al., 2003), with a significant drop in physical activity engagement occurring during the transition from middle-school to high school (Humbert et al., 2008). It is suggested that if physical activity patterns are established in childhood, these behaviours will persist into adulthood (Vu, Murrie, Gonzalex, & Jobe, 2006) yet young women's experiences with physical activity are complex (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Sleaf & Wormald, 2001; Lamb, Oliver, & Kirk, 2018). Physical inactivity is especially an issue for young women who are minorities and also reside in underserved neighbourhoods (Trost, McCoy, VanderVeur, Mallya, Duffy & Foster, 2013) because they have significantly less opportunities than young women in more affluent

neighbourhoods to engage in active pursuits (Sabo, 2009). Research suggest that factors that influence physical activity participation of young people in low-income, ethnically diverse neighbourhoods differ markedly from those that shape the experience of young people who reside in more affluent, predominantly white neighbourhoods (Johnson, 2000; Burton, Turrell, & Oldenburg, 2003). Further, many studies suggest that the health risks related to low levels of physical activity are worse for people who live in underserved communities (Richter, Erhart, Vereecken, Zambon, Boyce, & Gabhainn, 2009).

Epidemiological studies have dominated physical activity research, yet they lack the capacity to capture the complex lived experiences of those who engage in physical activity (Stride, Flintoff, & Scraton, 2018; Wright & Macdonald, 2010). For example, they tend to document quantitatively, the duration and regularity of young people's participation over prescribed periods of time (Cale, 1996), cast all young people as a homogeneous group (Gard & Wright, 2005), and fail to account for the subjective differences that characterize individual experiences within any given group of young people (Stride, 2016). This kind of research offers narrow notions of what counts as physical activity and neglects the informal and diverse ways that young people engage in physical activity (Wright, Macdonald, & Groom, 2003).

Defining Physical Activity

A noteworthy limitation of the more recent qualitative research on the experiences young women have with physical activity includes the struggle for the research participants in these studies to define the term physical activity (Sleap & Wormald, 2001; Clark, Spence, & Holt, 2011). In Clark et al.'s (2011) study they interviewed young women aged 12 to assess their perceptions of physical activity but identified that a limitation was the narrow view of the girls' understanding of the term and therefore their findings may have not been a good indication of their level of engagement in physical activity. Yet, Flintoff & Scraton (2001) had done the same assessment with a group of young women aged 15 and 16 years old a decade previously and found that their use of the term physical activity provided a wider understanding of the research being conducted by the subjects and discovered that a large number of young women actually were very active. In Sleap and Wormald's (2001) study, the young women had a

narrow understanding of physical activity and thought of it only as sport or exercise. The young women of the latter study think of physical activity as when someone is exerting themselves and working up a sweat, not necessarily low intensity activities like walking (Sleap & Wormald, 2001) and therefore they did not perceive themselves as active. This was common with an activity like dancing, which was perceived as physical activity to some (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001) and not to others (Sleap & Wormald, 2001; Clark et al., 2011).

Physical Activity Supports

Young women experience a range of support for their engagement in physical activity. Most commonly expressed in the literature are the aspects of “fun” and “feeling good”, opportunities to be social with peers, having choice, and positive experiences that sustained their engagement in physical activity (Flintoff and Scraton, 2001; Sleap & Wormald, 2001; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Casey et al., 2009; Yungblut, Schinke, & McGannon, 2012).

In Flintoff and Scraton’s (2001) study the young women suggested that they engaged in physical activity because it was “something to do”, something that was regarded as more productive than doing nothing (p. 9). But they also expressed that they valued physically active lifestyles and were motivated to take part in them because of dominant discourses of health and well-being (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Sleap & Wormald, 2001; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008). Benefits of physical activity perceived by young women include improved health and good appearance. Losing weight was also a common motive for young women (Sleap & Wormald, 2001).

There are findings that suggest that family support is one of the most important factors shaping young women's engagement in physical activity (Humbert et al., 2008; Casey, Eime, Payne, & Harvey, 2009; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010). Using Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and field, with the former representing a way to understand how social circumstances elicit certain behaviours, and the latter referring to a site that is bound by a set of specific social and cultural practices and ideologies (Bourdieu, 1984), Quarmby and Dagkas (2010) concur that family is an important *field* that transmits physical activity preferences and behaviors. They later focused on single-parent families and used

Bourdieu's (1984) concept of capital, which entails the numerous resources individuals can generate, including social and economic, to engage in certain activities. They suggest that single-parent families are socially and economically disadvantaged and this severely impacts young people's engagement with physical activity (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013). Other studies suggest that young people with one parent adopt more sedentary behaviours (Quarmby, Dagkas, & Bridge, 2010).

Another form of support for young people's engagement in physical activity were accessible programs. In a study focused on young people situated in a Canadian inner-city, it was found that adult-supervised programs in the neighbourhood were an important form of support for their participation in physical activity (Holt, Cunningham, Sehn, Spence, Newton, & Ball, 2009). The same study also found that these adult-supervised spaces encouraged young people to build resiliency (Holt et al., 2009).

Informal ways of being active, outside of traditional sport-based curriculum in school physical education were found to be a predominant enabler for young women to be active outside of school (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). In so saying, Flintoff & Scraton (2001) stress that the context of young women's participation must be relevant to their needs and interests. When young women felt valued and could control their environments, physical activity had much more meaning and relevancy to them (O'Sullivan & MacPhail, 2010) compared to the little control they have over choices in the physical education context (Evans, 2006). Other reasons young women enjoyed physical activity outside of the school context were due to less pressure to perform for teachers and boys and consequently less fear of being perceived as incompetent and gazed at (Evans, 2006).

Learning new skills and feeling competent was also explained as a reason for participating in physical activity (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Garrett, 2004; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Casey et al., 2009). Receiving recognition for their accomplishment of the acquisition of new skills was found to be a factor explaining young women's engagement in physical activity (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Casey et al., 2009). Feeling competent provided the young women with an

acquired sense of empowerment and this confidence loosened restrictions imposed by structural, social and cultural norms (Garrett, 2004).

Barriers to Physical Activity

There are many more constraints than supports explored in the literature regarding young women's lived experiences with physical activity. Outside the school context, there is focus on the logistics of taking part in physical activity, such as the financial cost, transportation (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Sleaf & Wormald, 2001; Casey et al., 2009) the effort required to organize oneself to be active (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001) and the lack of opportunities available (McEnvoy, MacPhail, & Enright, 2016). There is also a focus on young people's transition out of the school context, where young people were faced with competing priorities like employment, a social life, post-secondary education and struggled to negotiate time and other resources dedicated for physical activity (Wright & Laverty, 2010).

Some barriers indicated in the physical education context include, wearing a uniform to class and post class showers (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Sleaf & Wormald, 2001). There are also other barriers that are significantly problematic for young women in the physical education context in relation to gender discourse. Often the school-based physical education setting is considered the primary site where teaching about the importance of being physically active and the worth of lifelong participation takes place (Azzarito & Solmon, 2005). For many young women, however, school physical education is not necessarily a pleasant experience and they become disengaged from it and consequently all forms of physical activity (Garrett, 2004; Knowles, Niven, & Fawcner, 2014).

Premised on the idea of developing healthy, well-rounded and moral individuals, physical education is understood by some as a space for embodying white, middle-class, elitist and male values (Coakley, 2004). Young women are impacted by these narrow and traditional views of gender and internalize these notions to understand their experiences (Garrett, 2004). Physical education/culture settings have been considered spaces where discourses pertaining to femininity are created, reproduced and maintained (Azzarito, Solmon & Harrison, 2006; Kirk, 1999). These gendered norms create complex issues for young women,

especially during the transition from middle school to high school, when young women are preoccupied with forming an identity that adheres to a stereotypical feminine identity rather than the active self (Knowles et al., 2014). Many school physical education programs emphasize sport-based activity and this reinforces male competence, leaving young women to internalize that they are less competent (Garrett, 2004). In this scenario young women's lack of participation is often construed as the "problem" (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001, p. 5). Lack of competence was found to stir feelings of inadequacy and embarrassment. Embarrassment stemmed from not only being evaluated on accomplishing tasks they felt inadequate to perform but also from concerns about the way their bodies looked (Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Sleap & Wormald, 2001; Evans, 2006; Fisette, 2013). This was especially an issue if boys were present (Evans, 2006). Not only did the young women in Evans' (2006) study not want to appear less able and inferior to their male counterparts, but they also feared being mocked by them, intensifying their feelings of inadequacy (p. 552). For many young women, physical education is a balancing act of seeming competent but also trying to conform to feminine standards of performances and appearances (Evans, 2006; Garrett, 2004; Knowles et al., 2014). In this context, young women perceived that they would be rejected by boys if they did not maintain this balancing act and so often resisted this pressure by withdrawing from activities (Evans; 2006; Garrett, 2004; Knowles et al., 2014). Other strategies of resistance used by young women in this study involved positioning themselves during physical activity to make impressive athletic movements to gain approval of the boys (Evans, 2006). Evans (2006) theorizes that if young women were to show competence in the physical education context, they would consequently be perceived as demonstrating a "masculine gender performance" (p. 553), something that is again, embarrassing as it is undesirable. Hills (2006) contends that young women in physical activity contexts are aware of inequalities between the two genders but continue to act in ways that strengthen normative relations of power (p.550).

Scrutiny from boys is also understood as something that impacts the comfort of young women in PE classes (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Evans, 2006). Young women in Evans' (2006) study felt that their bodies were on display and needed to present them in ways that were

considered appealing to the males in the class. In single-sex classes, surveillance from teachers who were evaluating performance was also seen as a deterrent to participation (Evans, 2006). The teacher's gaze was perceived as scrutiny from a person in an authoritative position and therefore their gaze was perceived of as similarly critical as that received from male peers (Evans, 2006). Moreover, a different study revealed that even in single-sex environments young women "internalize the gaze and regulate each other" (Hill, 2015, p. 675). Single-sex classes are meant to be a safe space for the young women to enact their true identities and move their bodies how they wished (Azzarito & Hill, 2013), but still young women have been found to exclude other young women who do not conform to ideal feminine behaviour (Hill, 2015). Public spaces outside the school context have also been deemed as risky places because young women's bodies are on display to be looked at and be labeled (Azzarito & Hill, 2013). It was found in Azzarito and Hill's (2013) study that the home, especially the seclusion of their bedrooms, was a place that was safe and comfortable for the young women who could move their bodies without being surveilled there.

Other criticisms of physical education classes, expressed by young women include the choice of activities available to them (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Fisette, 2013). In Fisette's (2013) study, young women discussed how the curriculum lacked choice, and suggested that when they could choose from two activities to take part in, these were inevitably framed by gender norms. If they did not want their sexuality questioned, there was really only one choice for them - the more 'feminine' option (Fisette, 2013).

Physical education teachers sustained gender stereotypes and unequal power relations and this caused the young women a lot of frustration and annoyance (Fisette, 2013, p. 200). Young women felt that physical education was not challenging enough for them and felt their teachers tended to soften their attitudes towards girls' participation (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). Teachers were also found to show more respect towards the boys and act sarcastically towards girls' efforts and skill levels (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Fisette, 2013).

This is unfortunate because physical education teachers are potentially able to make a big impact on the physical activity levels of this population (Cale, 1996). They could target young women by considering the messages and opportunities existing during their physical education classes. Physical education could be a site for challenging dominant gender discourse that influences the young women's engagement (Cale, 1996). Flintoff & Scraton (2001) contend that physical education could be more satisfying for teachers and enjoyable for young women if teachers can offer an emotionally safe and supportive environment and recognize the range of aspirations, among the young women in their classes.

Underserved Young People Specific Literature

Although there has been considerable attention to the lived experiences young people have with physical activity in the last decade (Quarmby, 2014; Stride, 2016), there has been little focus on the place and meaning of physical activity in the lives young people situated in underserved areas (Humbert et al., 2008; McEnvoy et al., 2016). McEnvoy et al.'s (2016) study adds to the recent interest of young people situated in these contexts. Using a social-constructivist paradigm their study investigates young Irish people in a disadvantaged community, and the particular enablers and constraints which they experience as well as the ways in which they used their agency to take part in physical activity. Group interviews revealed that both structure and agency impact young people's experiences with physical activity as a combination (McEnvoy et al., 2016). For these young people, family members, peers and friend groups were represented as an important form of support. They indicated that one way of enjoying physical activity was "exercising collective agency" by spontaneously organizing themselves as a group (p. 1167). Yet, they also identified when their peers were not interested in physical activity, it would negatively influence their health-related behaviour. Schools were also identified as a positive form of introduction to physical activity, but the study identified that not all schools place importance on physical activity and this negatively impacted the young people's inclinations to engage in activity. The young people also did not like the level of surveillance the schools enforced. They felt constrained by this. This surveillance also happened outside of the school context and felt that they were not even able to leave their homes. So, going to recreational facilities and engaging in physical

activity was perceived to be a way for them to avoid getting in trouble (McEnvoy et al., 2016). Still, they also perceived that there was a lack of places for them to go to and so took to hanging around the streets. It was found that the young people desired a variety of options, but felt betrayed because they were not involved in the decision-making processes about what options they would like available to them. Including young people in this process is deemed vital for facilitating appropriate, diverse and accessible physical activity (McEnvoy et al., 2016). This study found that young people attempted to establish their autonomy but are also constrained by their interdependence to social structures (McEnvoy, et al., 2016). Of concern, was that the concept of engaging in physical activity to keep out of trouble was prevalent in their thought patterns. This sort of concept has been used widely by adults and policy makers (McEnvoy et al., 2016).

Parker, Morgan, Farooq, Moreland & Pitchford (2019) assessed the impact of a sport intervention program on young people situated in inner-city areas of London, in the UK. The use of sport and physical recreation in these areas has been found to be an acceptable way to promote the adoption of socially acceptable behaviour or ‘citizenship’ qualities, which would help them turn away from delinquency, anti-social behaviour and youth crime (Parker et al., 2019). One young person interviewed expressed that sport was central to their life and made the connection that sport was essential for their social development. They also expressed that it helped reduce feelings of exclusion and marginalization. This study confirms that sport-based interventions can serve to enable young people to be more engaged in their communities which has the potential for them to develop a sense of social responsibility, deterring them from engaging in risky behaviour (Parker et al., 2019).

It is clear within the literature that not all underserved communities are able to provide effective interventions or programming for positive development like the study above. A study assessing the community programming in a disadvantaged Canadian neighbourhood, finds that the programming was not meeting the needs and expectations of young people and their parents (Beaulac, Bouchard, & Kristjansson, 2009). Using a social-ecological model to show multiple layers of participation influence, findings suggested both young people and parents shared common perspectives regarding barriers to participation in

physical activity in their community. Accessibility was a crucial barrier, especially for females as the males would often take over the one gymnasium in the community center. Financial cost was identified by both the young people and the parents to be a barrier as well as suitable transportation to facilities (Beaulac et al., 2009). As for the supports experienced by these participants, parent and peer support were identified by the young males to be positively associated with engagement in physical activity, while the young women regarded these things as negative influences. Significantly, the parents identified that social support was important for their children's engagement but from their peers and not themselves. Other concerns included the lack of variety and choice of physical activity and culturally appropriate activities (Beaulac et al., 2009). What was very important to these young people was that programs offered opportunities for both structured and unstructured forms of play (Beaulac et al., 2009).

Wright, Harwood, Parker, & Arroyo (2005) provided insight into the outcomes when several of the barriers, such as the ones identified by the disadvantaged young people in the study above, are removed. Their report outlines a successful community-based physical activity program in Australia for young 'at-risk' women, and several key conditions were identified as necessary for positive experiences. These included respectful relationships that promoted equality between facilitators and participants, an emotionally safe environment for young women, a sense of freedom to make their own choices and control over the extent of their participation without strict authoritative figure instructing them on what to do. It was also important to the young women that the adult or program leaders actively engaged in the activities as opposed to just observing. An all-female environment was also essential to their level of motivation and enjoyment in the program (Wright, Harwood et al., 2005). Significant findings reported were the need for both transportation to and from programming as well as a meal, that could be shared with other participants. This work and that of others suggests a need for relevant and accessible physical activity programming for underserved young people (Wright, Harwood et al., 2005; Beaulac et al., 2009; Shaillee, Theeboom, & Skille, 2017).

Qualitative research that specifically focuses on young women from underserved neighbourhoods is not represented enough in the research literature

and this is how the present research study will contribute to the body of literature on the topic.

Sub-Groups of Marginalized Young Women

Minority groups, ethnic groups, and immigrants encounter numerous challenges including language, discrimination and social norms (Guerin, Diiriye, Corrigan, & Guerin, 2003). Often, these groups are located in those neighbourhoods that are considered underserved (Strandbu, Bakken, & Sletten, 2019). Ethnic or minority adolescent groups in physical activity research have received little attention compared to the attention given to White adolescents (Mabry, Young, Cooper, Meyees, Joffe & Duggan, 2003). Yet, like everyone else they are expected to conform to neoliberal logic and be responsible for their health, or be considered “others” (Dagkas, 2014). For many of these minority ethnic groups, there are structural issues that preclude them from making what others would regard as responsible choices for their health (Flintoff & Webb, 2012). In what follows, I attend to the particular forms of support and barriers that impact the lived experiences of different ethnic or minority groups.

Young African American Women

Ethnic or minority groups, young African American women in particular, in the United States have been labeled as high risk for cardiovascular disease (Mabry et al., 2003). It has also been found that their physical activity levels decline significantly during adolescence (Blackshear, 2019). Research has suggested that developing physical activity habits earlier in their lives can help reduce this risk, therefore there are studies emerging on how young African American women experience physical activity. One study in particular compares their experiences with those of white adolescent girls (Mabry et al., 2003). Both groups described similar forms of supports and barriers such as health benefits, fun, motivation from peers, family, fear of looking masculine, and negative experiences with the physical education teacher to name a few (Mabry et al., 2003). In Mabry and colleagues’ (2003) study, the differences in their experiences lie in how they experienced their bodies. The young African American women showed greater acceptance and self-esteem for bigger body sizes compared to their White counterparts (Mabry et al., 2003). This was attributed to receiving encouraging support from community members while the

White young women were concerned with their body image because they were dealing with trying to feel accepted by their female peers (Mabry et al., 2003). This could also be explained by the kind of exposure the African American women experienced in the media as they would see a diverse range of body images while the White young women were more likely to be exposed to “skinny” White women in the media (Mabry et al., 2003). It should also be noted that young African American women’s participation in physical activity was increased when their father is involved (Blackshear, 2019).

Indigenous Young People

It is important to account for the experiences of young Canadian Indigenous peoples, a minority group specific to Canada, because of the cultural demographics of the community in which the present study was conducted. Indigenous youth in Canada represent an underserved segment of the population in the country. Research shows that they experience higher rates of obesity, obesity-related diseases and urban poverty in comparison to non-Indigenous youth in the country (Katzmarzyk, 2008; Forsyth, 2014). While there is recent qualitative research published in regards to the barriers and challenges they face (Mason, McHugh, Strachan & Boule, 2019; Hudson, Spence, & McHugh, 2019), there exists very little research about the experiences of young Indigenous women, in particular, and their experiences with physical activity.

Outside of the school environment, many Indigenous youths experience barriers in the urban and rural context that prevent them from engaging in sport and recreation. These include the cost of registration fees, equipment, transportation, lack of awareness of the benefits of participation and a lack of trained coaches (Mason et al., 2019; Canadian Heritage, 2005). Indigenous youth have also reported racial discrimination by their peers in the physical education setting and from people in the bleachers in the community sport setting, and this often led them to experience exclusion in these spaces (Mason & Koehli, 2012). Some Indigenous youth report that they stop involvement in the sport all together to evade the mistreatment (Mason et al., 2019). In institutional spaces like physical education or the mainstream sport system they report feeling alienated because of lack of cultural sensitivity and relevancy (Mason et al., 2019). Moreover, young Indigenous people have also reported that they feel empowered

and a greater degree of comfort when they engage in physical activity with other Indigenous youth or family members compared to their peers in their community or school (Mason et al., 2019).

Young Immigrants

Some research has focused on the role that physical activity can have on immigrant youth who have resettled in Canada (Doherty & Taylor, 2007; Taylor & Doherty, 2005). In an attempt to better understand their attitudes and experiences with physical activity in its broad sense, Taylor & Doherty (2005) conducted focus groups in an English second language (ESL) high school. As voiced by the participants, they experienced both positive and negative aspects to their engagement in physical activity once in their new country. Positive aspects included perceived social, emotional and health benefits, learning to speak English and also learning about their new country's culture (Taylor & Doherty, 2005). Some of the negative aspects included experiencing social exclusion, being unfamiliar with activities, and language difficulties (Taylor & Doherty, 2005). The study identified differences between the experiences of young men and women. The young women in particular discussed employment and family as barriers to participation. They also discussed that informal forms of physical activity were more enjoyable to them than organized sport or physical education (Taylor & Doherty, 2005).

Young Muslim Women

Latterly, there has been increased attention to young South Asian, Muslim women and their particular experiences with physical activity (Kay, 2006; Stride, 2014, 2016; Hamzeh & Oliver, 2012; Strandbu et al., 2019; Stride et al., 2018; Dagkas & Hunter, 2015). Throughout physical activity research, young Muslim women have been positioned as inactive and restricted by religion and responsibilities in the home (Kay, 2006) and this has been regarded as a strong determinant of their decision to participate or not (Taylor & Doherty, 2005). However, Stride (2014) explains that not all Muslim girls are the same and that they exercise agency in their physical activity pursuits, and actively resist dominant discourses linked to their ethnic background (Stride, 2016). Although physical education has been recognized as an important site for young women from lower social classes or of ethnic minority to improve activity levels

(Azzarito & Solmon, 2005), the home was found to be an important site for young Muslim women to be physically active (Stride, 2016; Stride et al., 2018).

Looked-after Young People

Other marginalized groups of young people include those who are ‘looked-after’ or in the care of local authorities (Quarmby 2014; O’Donnell, Sandford & Parker, 2019). Research suggests that these young people experience a lot of barriers to their participation, including disruption in their participation in school sport from having to relocate, as well as institutional constraints, such as having to deal with physical activity accessibility issues with the authorities. Yet, they still valued sport and physical activity in the broader scheme of their lives (Quarmby, 2014). This is in contrast to findings in a different study that suggest and looked-after young people did not perceive any benefits to their wellbeing when they engaged in physical education and school sport (O’Donnell et al., 2019). This is conceivably problematic because for many looked-after young people, as the physical education setting may be the only opportunity they’ll have for physical activity (Quarmby & Pickering, 2016).

Ethnic or minority groups of young people have been framed as a homogenous group of “others” and considered “at-risk” (Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Hill, 2015; Dagkas, 2014). Their socio-economic status and other structures that impact their access to health services are commonly disregarded and rather, these young people are viewed as failing to conform to dominant health imperatives (Dagkas, 2014).

Physical Activity Outdoors

Neighbourhood environments are key spaces where young people have the opportunity to participate in physical activity (Davison & Lawson, 2006). They are especially a significant form of support for the engagement of physical activity for underserved young people (Wilson, Lawman, Segal, & Chappell, 2011; Ding, Sallis, Kerr, Lee, & Rosenberg, 2011), more so than support from parents (Wilson et al., 2011). Generally, parks are a free or a low fee public space available to anyone for recreational or physical activity purposes. For adolescents in particular, a study showed that neighbourhoods are popular for walking, including moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) (McGrath, Hopkins, & Hinckson,

2015). Still, parks are found to be an under-utilized space for young women to engage in physical activity (Evenson, Cho, Rodriguez, & Cohen, 2018) as boys are reported to have greater levels of physical activity including active transportation in their neighbourhoods than girls (Esteban-Cornejo, Carlson, Conway, Cain, Saelens, Frank, Glanz, Roman & Sallis, 2016). Consequently, young women accumulate less MVPA minutes (Evenson et al., 2018). In so saying, parks seem likely to be an ideal space for young women to accumulate MVPA. In Evenson et al.'s study in the United States, an accelerometer and GPS device (Global Positioning Device) was used and revealed that when young women were found to be at a park, they were engaged in more MVPA minutes on those days compared to the days they were not at the park (2018).

Parents often have a high degree of authority over when and where their children go to be active, which results in young people utilizing their local environments to engage in physical activity (Davison & Lawson, 2006). Road safety and stranger danger were found to be the main reasons why parents might restrict outdoor play and mobility around their local neighbourhood (Carver, Timperio, Hesketh, & Crawford, 2010). It was also found that parents imposed greater restrictions on girls when it came to outdoor play and active transportation. When parents enforced restrictions on their children's outdoor activity time, the youth did not accumulate the recommended MVPA outside of school. This was especially true for young women (Carver et al., 2010).

However, as adolescents age they gain autonomy and become increasingly mobile outside their homes (McGrath et al., 2015). In so saying, young men tend to experience higher degrees of independence and less regard for parents' rules about outdoor play and also experience a higher degree of spatial freedom whilst young women are advised to take more precaution (Carver et al., 2010; Clark, 2015).

Perceived safety of the neighbourhood on the part of both young women and their parents has a huge effect on whether or not they will engage in physical activity outdoors (Cohen, Ashwood, Scott, Overton, Evenson, Voorhees, & MacKenzie, 2006; Motl, Dishman, Saunders, Dowda, & Pate, 2007; Wilson et al., 2011). Eighty percent of young women in Western Australia surveyed about their

physical activity constraints revealed that they avoid engaging in physical activity after dark (James & Embrey, 2001). A concerning reason for this was the narrative that young women are targets of physical or sexual assaults at night, especially when they are alone. James and Embrey (2001) found that in their study when the young women had the option to be outdoors after dark, fear became a barrier, and at that point, young women perceived that they had to negotiate precautions needed to be safe or avoid participation all together. Research has shown that after dark, young women felt as though they were constantly checking over their shoulders to see if someone was following them (James & Embrey, 2001; Clark, 2015). It was suggested by young women that if they had safe transportation, good lighting and appropriate supervision they would be more inclined to participate in outdoor physical activity after dark (James & Embrey, 2001).

A study found that parents perceived greater safety from strangers for boys rather than girls (Estaban-Cornejo, Carlson, Conway, Cain, Saelens, Frank, Glanz, Roman & Sallis, 2018). For young women, discourses of vulnerability, gender and sexuality play out in local outdoor spaces which has implications for their participation in physical activity or exercise (Clark, 2015). Young women, especially transitioning from childhood to adolescence can be subject to taunts, gawking, sexual harassment in these settings which they then must negotiate as safe or unsafe (Clark, 2015; James & Embrey, 2001). Parents further limit their daughters by restricting their access to outdoor physical activity unless they have supervision (Clark, 2015). This promotes the notion that young women are weak, and defenseless, which frames them as incapable of doing physical activity. Consequently, they embody gendered constructions of risk (Clark, 2015). These restrictions and constraints framed by the discourse, leaves young women with little independence (Clark, 2015), yet, we live in neoliberal times where individuals are deemed solely responsible for their health and development (O'Flynn, 2010).

During transitions into adolescence, young women begin to internalize fears about the safety of being outdoors based on the narratives they have been told (James & Embrey, 2001; Clark, 2015). This impacts their physical activity choices. Clark (2015) found that there is a difference in experiences of the degree

of harassment depending on the socio-economic status of a neighbourhood. Although young women from low and high-income neighbourhoods were constrained by 'risk/vulnerable' discourses, in low-income neighbourhoods it was found that the more male-dominated outdoor spaces were depicted as off limits or dangerous to young women. This is reflected in a study conducted in an American inner-city neighbourhood where girls were not welcome to play on outdoor basketball courts (Atencio, 2010). In this study, observations and interviews fleshed out the dynamics occurring on a public basketball court. It was found that the young women were seldom able to access the courts because of safety concerns but also due to the young men enacting more exclusionary practices on these casual and unsupervised spaces in the neighbourhood. As a result, these outdoor public basketball courts became spaces where young women could only watch and cheer. When young women did engage in physical activity, it was in spaces that were indoors and supervised by a coach or trainer (Atencio, 2010).

Digital Technology, Social Media

Recent studies have given attention to how digital technology and social media impact young women and their outlook on physical activity. I believe this to be relevant to my research because all of the young women interviewed either owned a phone or shared one with a family member to have a presence on social media.

Young people are avid users of social media (Goodyear, Armour, & Wood, 2019) and are being raised in a digital world that shapes their engagement in physical activity including its place as a barrier to physical activity because it consumes free time (Beaulac et al., 2009). This technology also encourages the monitoring of physical activity behaviours and impacts how young women learn about health and their bodies and this is affecting their confidence (Rich, 2018; Pang, Varea, Cavallin, & Cupac, 2018). Rich (2018) argues that because technology is part of our everyday lives, young women are subject to pressures set out by pervasive neoliberal ideologies. In other words, these technologies are causing young women to change their health practices to reflect constantly changing and newer trends (Rich, 2018). She also argues that technology can be seen as a site for both oppression, in the sense that bodies are being administrated,

but also empowering in the sense that digital technology provides the chance for resistance (Rich, 2018). There is no doubt that the increase of digital technology contributes to how people learn about their own, but also others', personal health and bodies (Rich, 2018).

Rich and Miah (2014) consider social media a form of informal pedagogy, and informal spaces of learning are considered just as important as institutional spaces (Tinning, 2010). This kind of technology tempts young women to consume in particular ways and also to monitor and judge the appearance of theirs and others' bodies (Rich, 2018). As young people interact with health-related content on social media, they participate in practices that confer status, quantify their own and others' engagement in physical activity and emphasize presentation which confines their conceptions of what a healthy body is (Lupton, 2015). This poses a potential dilemma concerning those who are currently marginalized in physical activity because they could be marginalized or surveilled even further leading to exclusion (Pang et al., 2018). In regards to the imagery found in digital spaces like social media, there has been concern that exposure to images that promote thinness, as an example, has been detrimental to people's mental and physical health (Tiggeman & Zaccardo, 2015). Rich (2018) has found that when young women take part in social media, the images that they see will encourage both happiness and empowerment but also anxiety and dissatisfaction.

Moreover, there is a lack of information on the relationship between young people and the health content they are exposed to on social media (Goodyear et al., 2019). But there is potential for social media to be used as a tool for physical activity promotion (Hausmann, Touloumtzis, White, Colbert, & Golding, 2017). In their study, it was revealed that a lot of young people access content related to body transformations (Goodyear et al., 2019). On the other hand, young people lack the capacity to navigate and understand the health-related content on social media and therefore may not engage with it in an emotionally safe way (Goodyear et al., 2019). Goodyear et al. (2019) suggest that an appropriate adult in the young person's life can help them understand how particular information can influence their health-related views and behaviours.

Previous Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks Used

The research on the topic presents a multiplicity of theoretical and methodological approaches used to narrow the focus on young people experiences with physical activity in its broad sense.

Social-ecological models deliberate on both individual and environmental influences on health-related behaviour like physical activity. The influential factors are interactive and transactional (Beaulac et al., 2009, p. 539). In Holt et al.'s (2009) study assessing the perceived physical activity opportunities and constraints for inner-city youth, findings reflected that constraints were perceived at multiple ecologic levels. This included safety concerns in the neighbourhood context, family circumstances, and staffing issues in programs (Holt, et al., 2009). The findings demonstrated that ecological models were useful for examining physical activity constraints and supports from multiple perspectives and can be used to better facilitate physical activity for inner-city youth (Holt et al., 2009). Casey and colleagues (2009) also use a social-ecological model to identify intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational factors that influence the engagement of rural adolescent girls in physical activity. For these young women situated in a rural area, interpersonal factors influenced their participation. For instance, they depended on their parents for a ride to sport facilities, otherwise they would not engage. Organizational factors also restricted their participation in physical activity. It was perceived that in their rural region they lacked opportunities because there are not enough players to fill a full team. The social-ecological model was good for digging up this interpersonal factor (Casey et al., 2009).

Feminist/poststructuralist theory has also been prominent in physical activity research (Garrett, 2004; Azzarito et al., 2006; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). This approach distinguishes young women as negotiators of power relations that shape social institutions and cultural products (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001, Azzarito et al., 2006). Of importance in this perspective is the idea that women or minorities are moved away from being positioned as oppressed, but rather individuals who are active agents able of resisting and disrupting dominant discourse and establishing their own identities and truths (Azzarito & Solmon, 2005). Schools and the physical education classroom are institutional spaces

where gendered discourses are produced, reproduced and maintained via social practices which is reflected by the sport-based curriculum (Azzarito & Solmon, 2005). Employing feminism and poststructuralism allows for the deconstruction of historical notions of gender and therefore can be useful for developing policies that resist dominant discourse in schools, change power relations and progress the engagement of young women in physical education (Azzarito & Solmon, 2005, p. 41).

A narrative approach is used by Knowles and colleagues (2014) to flesh out the reasons why adolescent girls become more inactive when they transitioned from middle school to high school. They viewed this method appropriate for the research question as the body is centrally placed during the process of telling their stories, and this could help recognize the embodied and physical experiences of the young women during this time of transition (Knowles et al., 2014).

An activist approach was used by Fisette's (2013) inquiry into the barriers that seven 14 and 15-year-old girls identified in the physical education class. First, they self-identified constraints and unequal power relations within their physical education at school and then had the opportunity to be "active agents of change" (Fisette, 2013, p. 188). During this phase, they exposed the issue and offered solutions in a school newspaper article that was circulated within the school (Fisette, 2013). Participants were able to exercise their agency and empower themselves by creating strategies to be engaged in activities and also voicing the barriers (Fisette, 2013).

Visual methods of data collection are increasingly being used (Hill, 2015; Azzarito & Hill, 2013). Literature has identified that young women are active outside of school but the extent of that engagement is unclear (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001), therefore visual representations framed and captured by the participant allowed for the collection of information regarding their participation in physical activity outside the school context (Hill, 2015). Enright and O'Sullivan (2012) contend that this kind of method does not replace typical methods of data collection but enhance the research. What is important in participatory visual methods is that the meaning of the image be interpreted by the participant and not the researcher (Enright & O'Sullivan, 2012).

Future Research and the Present Study

Little is known about the experiences of young women from minority groups and their participation in physical activity (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). Marginalized groups of young women are homogenized as having “bodies-at-risk”, are labeled as different, unhealthy and inactive (Hill & Azzarito, 2012, p. 264). The voices of minority ethnic groups of young women are necessary to change the one-dimensional story of young women’s experiences with physical activity and embody the diverse narratives in physical activity contexts (Hill, 2015). This is where my research fits in, as it seeks to hear the voices of young women who are underserved and their experiences with physical activity.

Summary

What this review of the literature aimed to do, was investigate how young women experience physical activity in its broadest sense. There is a breadth of information on the different social structures and discourses that intertwine to shape and influence how a young person experiences physical activity.

It is important to recognize that young people live complicated lives and their experiences with physical activity vary across different contexts and these need to be addressed if they are expected to adopt active lifestyles (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Tannehill, MacPhail, Walsh, & Woods, 2015). For young women, it is crucial to remember that they lead complex lives and that their bodies are used as tools to let the rest of the world know if they are physically competent. Its appearance, size and shape will also dictate the degree of acceptance of their peer groups, these notions play a role in young women’s decisions to engage in physical activity or not (Knowles et al., 2014). It is also important to note that young people’s experiences with physical activity evolve and change overtime (O’Sullivan & MacPhail, 2010; Lee, 2010) and therefore findings to the question *‘how do young women experience physical activity?’* cannot be generalized.

Although there has been research done on young people who live in disadvantaged areas (Beaulac et al., 2009; McEnvoy et al., 2016), the findings reflect the physical activity experiences of both young men and women. There is a paucity of research on the specific experiences of young women who reside in underserved communities. This is where my research study fits in. It seems

imperative that recreation professionals in urban areas, whose job it is to increase the participation of young women in physical activity, understand the lived experiences of their participants so that they can design and program plan accordingly for the best outcomes.

The next chapter of this thesis will outline the method and methodology and address how an interpretive framework is beneficial to understanding how young women who are situated in an underserved neighbourhood experience physical activity. By using an interpretive approach to frame the study, the participant's point of view will be used to understand the meanings that guide their understanding and practice of physical activity.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Method

In this chapter I discuss the research design used to address the research question: How do young women situated in an underserved community, in a Canadian inner-city, experience physical activity?

Paradigm

This study was positioned within an interpretive research paradigm, which aims to understand phenomena by exploring the meanings people attach to them. Research premised on an interpretivist world view focuses on grasping a person's or group's viewpoint by means of their rich descriptions of the social world. It seeks to know how the "experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.10). Interpretive researchers embrace the notion of "multiple realities" (Creswell, 2013, p. 20) and do not imagine there is a static 'truth' to be found. Interpretivists rely on participants' interpretations of situations they find themselves in, and these subjective meanings are located in social and historical context created via interactions with their surroundings (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Interpretivism does not aim to devise generalizable laws and rules or generate statistical data, but rather aims to engage in descriptive analysis, focused on in-depth understandings of a social phenomenon (Pope, 2006). The result can be rich portrayals of the lived-experiences of individuals or communities (De Maio & Allen, 2014). In contrast, positivist researchers seek to isolate cause and effect relationships, provide numerical descriptions and promote generalization of findings beyond the specific group or person being studied (Flick, 2009). Positivist research predominantly takes place in laboratory settings, and proceeds from an assumption that armed with the correct methods, the facts of a given phenomena can be found. Interpretive researchers, on the other hand, often collect data in a natural setting and analyze the data both inductively and deductively (Creswell, 2013). The final report is generally a representation of the participants' voices, the researcher's interpretations and a description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In the case of this study, my focus was to explore the voices of young women who reside in an underserved, inner-city community situated in a central Canadian province, to understand how they experience physical activity.

A social constructionist epistemology underpinned the choice of research design. Epistemology refers to “the nature of knowledge, its production and communication” (Devis-Devis, 2006, p. 39) and social constructionism is primarily concerned with the beliefs that people construct and how they understand their realities (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Social constructionism asserts that knowledge does not just happen, but humans create it by formulating concepts and schemes to make sense of experiences and that this constructed knowledge is always being tried and revised when faced with new experiences (Schwandt, 2007). These constructions have social, historical and cultural scopes, and our interpretations of experiences are not isolated but are rather negotiated through common practices, understandings and language (Schwandt, 2007; Creswell, 2013). Social constructionism has a relativist ontology (Creswell, 2013) and opposes realism and empirical notions (Schwandt, 2007) that assume knowledge can exist independently from beliefs and constructions (Creswell, 2013).

A feminist perspective was also used to inform this study. In-depth face-to-face interviews have been labeled as the choice of method for feminist research (Kelly, Burton, & Regan, 1994). Using the voices of the female participants allows them to verbalize for themselves, the issues they face in relation to their desire to engage in physical activity. This perspective affirms that differences exist among women (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Some argue that a constructivist stance does not advocate enough for an action agenda to aid people who are sidelined (Creswell, 2013). Specific issues such as inequality and oppression are important social issues that require attention. The new knowledge produced by this research can be used as a resource for creating social change (Kelly et al., 1994).

Qualitative research is a term used to refer to research approaches that share certain features. The data collected in qualitative research is “rich in descriptions of people, places, and conversations” (p. 2) which statistical or quantitative approaches cannot easily handle (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Research questions are formed to delve in matters and their complexity within a context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.2). Unlike quantitative research, which approaches the study with a particular question to test a hypothesis, in qualitative research, focus

is established as data is collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In-depth interviewing, is a technique employed in qualitative research that embodies the notion of collecting rich descriptions. Unstructured or open-ended interviews allow the researcher to guide an interview so that it unfolds to be able to capture vast amounts of detail from the participants in order to gain an understanding of their perspectives on a topic (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). Furthermore, the focus is to understand how participants' assumptions about a topic are “translated into daily activities, procedures, and interactions” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p.6). What there is to know about a person can be objective or subjective (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). The subjective is understood as experienced by only the individual themselves and therefore the subjective experiences cannot be known by others. Traditional scientific ways of knowing cannot grasp the essence of a lived-experience (Dale, 1996). Qualitative research, however, generates an interpretation of reality that is valuable in comprehending the human experience (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007).

Qualitative research requires that the question match the method and data analysis procedures (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002, p. 18). The adoption of a method that promotes the interpretation of lived experiences will allow the researcher to collect descriptive accounts of the values, meanings and actions of the research participants (Pope, 2006, p. 22). Qualitative research is descriptive and is presented in the form of words rather than numbers. Quotes from the collected data are used to exemplify and validate the presentation of results (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007).

An interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach most closely aligns with my interpretivist world views and social constructionist epistemology because it seeks to understand how people make sense of their lived experiences (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). The primary purpose of phenomenology is to condense an individual or group's experience with a particular phenomenon to create a description that expresses the essence of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990), as closely as possible to the lived experiences of the research participants (Allen-Collinson, 2009). This description will illustrate what and how the phenomenon is experienced by the research participants (Moustaka, 1994). Phenomenology is concerned with the idea that individuals have a voice and that

the best way to understand a social problem is to capture the essence of their stories through their voices (Tammemagi, 2014).

Different strands of phenomenology will have their own principles and perspectives (Allen-Collinson, 2009). Followers of Husserl (founder of phenomenology), for example, assert that within a descriptive framework, the phenomenon is not interpreted but rather accurately and carefully described (Giorgi, 2009). Husserl developed four major techniques that distinguish descriptive phenomenology (Allen-Collinson, 2009). These include epoche, a process adopted by the researcher to set aside assumptions and biases and the researcher's world becomes bracketed, reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis of essence (Moustaka, 1994). Husserl implies that "nothing is to be added to or subtracted from what is presented" and what is conceived of the phenomenon in consciousness by the perceiver must be carefully described as it is (Giorgi, 2009, p. 69). Heidegger (1962) (a pioneer of hermeneutic phenomenology), on the other hand, would argue that the description of a phenomenon is inherently an interpretation (as cited in van Manen, 1990). In interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology, "there is no description without interpretation" (Allen-Collinson, 2009, p. 285). Some argue that hermeneutics is not within the boundaries of phenomenological research and therefore should not be considered so (van Manen, 1990). But Gadamer (1986) infers that through a phenomenological text, something is described and named, but simultaneously this something is calling for it to be seen and understood or interpreted (as cited in van Manen, 1990). Nevertheless, certain techniques are valuable and useful in each discipline, such as bracketing the researcher's world or prejudgments, biases and preconceived ideas of a phenomenon (Allen-Collinson, 2009).

Phenomenological philosophers contend that an individual or individuals will experience the same phenomenon from different perspectives (Finlay, 2002) therefore a phenomenon has multiple ways of showing itself (Bevan, 2014). Fundamental to phenomenological research is that the researchers approach the phenomenon being examined with openness, therefore reflexivity is an important technique throughout the research process (Finlay, 2002). This methodology requires that the researcher separate themselves as much as possible from any preconceived beliefs and assumptions about the phenomenon so that they can

“attend genuinely” to the participants’ lived-experiences (Finlay, 2002, p. 537). Unlike a theoretical model that enforces outside logic on a phenomenon, phenomenology is an inductive approach that looks to dig up the internal logic of the researched (Gray, 2004). Phenomenology is not only concerned with understanding a phenomenon from a participant's feelings and perspectives but also those from people that the participant is close with in their life (Tammemagi, 2014). Throughout the data collection, questions were asked about how others closely involved in the participant’s life, experienced the phenomenon of physical activity, through the perspective of the participant, which was important in grasping how these young women experience physical activity.

Participants

There was a total of six participants, all of whom identify as female and reside in an underserved community in a Canadian inner-city. The study was conducted with young women who attend a youth drop-in program at a community center in their neighbourhood. The ages of the participants ranged from 12 to 18. One participant was 12 years of age, two of the participants were 14 years of age, one participant was 16 years of age, and the last two participants were 18 years of age. The community in which the participants were recruited is ethnically diverse, and it was unsurprising to find a range of ethnicities among the group. Two young Canadian Indigenous women were part of this group and the other four girls were at some point newcomers to Canada from various African countries. However, their years spent in Canada range from 5 to 12 years. Their interviews were conducted during the summer break and therefore they were not in school at the time, however they all indicated that they would be returning to school in the Fall, apart from the two 18-year-olds who were working on summer courses that would allow them to gain credit so that they could graduate and obtain their high school diplomas. It is vital to note that this group of participants were not treated as a homogenous group within the population but rather the research recognized the differences and similarities that each brought to the study.

Sampling

This study utilized a purposive sampling method, which is commonly undertaken within qualitative research (Flick, 2009). Researchers engage in purposive sampling to strategically choose who the research participants should

be in relation to the context of the research and the nature of the research objectives (Given, 2008). Selected individuals met specific characteristics of the population of interest, in the case of this study the sample was composed of individuals who identified as female and as a youth and who also resided in an underserved community in one of Canada's central provinces. Six participants were chosen to participate in interviews which would provide insight into their lived-experiences of physical activity. Morse et al. (2002) maintain that choosing an appropriate sample aids with the study's "reliability and validity" (p. 18) as the sample will be best equipped to embody knowledge of the research topic. van Manen (2014) argues that samples strive for empirical generalizations that can be applied to the population at large, however this is not possible within a phenomenological methodology. The sample size appropriate to a phenomenological methodology is dependent on the nature of the study but should aim for enough data to enable rich descriptions of the lived-experiences of the phenomenon to emerge (van Manen, 2014). Given that one individual can generate possibly hundreds of concepts, a large number of subjects is not necessary for the generation of rich descriptive data (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). So, Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) suggest that a typical phenomenological study can have anywhere from one to ten research participants while Polkinghorne (1989) recommends five to twenty-five participants who have experienced the phenomenon.

The participants for this study were recruited from a youth drop-in program that takes place in a community center in an inner-city neighbourhood in a Canadian city. This program is for young people, aged 12-18. The youth who attend this program live in the area and must get there themselves. This program offers opportunities for outings, craft making, physical activity programs, leadership, and free time in the gymnasium. After receiving institutional consent, the youth drop-in program coordinator handed out recruitment flyers along with the information sheet and consent forms to the female identifying youth who attended program. When a participant was interested and obtained permission from her parents or guardians to participate, I would set up a time to conduct the interview at the community center, a space familiar to her. When other female youth saw that I was there and asked what I was up to, they became interested in

being participants. Since they were in program, they were suitable subjects for the research. Sampling took on a snowball effect after the first two interviews.

Ethical Procedures

Ethics was guided by the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008 and was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee before data collection commenced (University of Waikato, 2019)

Ethical considerations included my former employment as the coordinator of sport and youth programs and mentor to young women at the community center where the participants were recruited. In order to ensure participants did not feel pressured or coerced to participate in the study by me, a third party was used to inform the potential participants about the study. This third party was the current coordinator of the youth drop-in program. I gave this person information flyers about the study to hand out to the female identifying youth who frequented the drop-in program (See Appendix A for Recruitment flyer). If these participants were interested, the program coordinator handed them a consent form and information sheet with my contact information. Potential participants could either contact me directly or tell the program coordinator that they were interested. I made it clear to all that inquired that I am no longer a staff member at the community center but rather a university student doing research.

Prior to entering the community center to recruit and interview participants, institutional consent was obtained (See Appendix B for Institutional Consent Form). Four of the six participants were under the age of eighteen which required them to obtain consent from a parent or guardian before they could be contacted to take part in the research study (See Appendix C for Consent Form). The age of consent to participate in research studies in Canada is 18 years of age. All of the participants had to give their own consent prior to participating in the study as well. Research participants and their parents or guardians were given the primary investigator's (myself) contact information as well as the project advisor's contact information so that they could ask any questions about the project at any time.

Each participant also received an information sheet that outlines why the research is being conducted, what will happen if they choose to participate, confidentiality, their right to change their mind about being part of the research at any point and returning to them their transcribed interview (See Appendix D for the Information Sheet).

Maintaining participant anonymity and confidentiality is important throughout this project. This project used pseudonyms when describing participant data in order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also given a transcribed version of their interview which they could look through and make changes to if they were uncomfortable sharing something they had said if they wished to do so.

All data, which includes audio files and transcribed interviews, were stored on a password protected computer in an encrypted file only accessible by myself, the researcher. The signed consent forms and field notes were stored in a locked drawer, only accessible by me.

Reciprocity was exercised throughout the data collection process. Research participants offer personal and emotional data that convey their experiences in life and they give up a considerable amount of their day to be a part of the research. It is important to convey to them your appreciation and not let them feel abandoned (Creswell, 2013). I recognized that there was a need to be sensitive to the power imbalances between myself and the subjects, especially since the population of interest is considered vulnerable due to their age, and marginalised.

Procedure and Data Collection

After obtaining ethical approval and institutional consent from the community center, a purposive sample was recruited with the help of a third-party person, the youth drop-in program coordinator. Upon receiving consent from the young women's parents or guardians and consent forms were returned to the third-party, the researcher (me) was able to contact the participants to set up an interview. Interviews are the most popular method of data collection in phenomenological research (Bevan, 2014). Face-to-face interviews were conducted in an office room in the community center where the youth drop-in

program takes place, as well as in the recreation complex across the street where programming for the youth sometimes takes place. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews which permitted the participant to offer in-depth accounts of their experiences of the phenomenon as lived (Bevan, 2014). This also allowed them to lead the conversation in a fashion that was evocative to them (Brown, Webb, Robinson, & Cotgreave, 2018). The interview schedule was developed to elicit first-hand descriptions of participants' experiences with physical activity; therefore, questions were open-ended (Giorgi, 2009). Questions included "What does physical activity mean to you?", "Can you tell me about a time you participated in physical activity?" and "What do you feel when you do physical activity?" (See Appendix E for the Interview Schedule). Throughout the interview, I probed for detail and clarity of responses to achieve a better and mutual understanding of the experience being described (Bevan, 2014).

During the interviews, I refrained from assuming the role of the expert researcher, bearing in mind that the participants are experts of their experiences and the things they know (Creswell, 2013). Participants were also reminded that they could refuse to answer a question if they did not want to, and also that they could stop an interview at any point in time.

Participant interviews lasted between 20 and 47 minutes ($M = 30.6$ minutes, $SD = 10.7$ minutes). All five interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Research participants were given pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. Although six participants were recruited, only five interviews were conducted as two of the participants wished to be interviewed as a pair. This was acceptable to the researcher because as they are young people who have never been interviewed before, they felt much more comfortable being interviewed together as it encouraged conversation via a supportive social setting (Highet, 2003). In the findings and discussion chapters, any identifying names of places which the participants discussed were changed to "community center" or "city" or "town".

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was based on an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, "a process of moving from the descriptive to the

interpretive” (Brocki & Wearden, 2006, p. 97). IPA is strongly associated with an interpretive tradition (Smith, 2004), and related to phenomenology because it is concerned with exploring how participants create meaning in relation to their experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It also acknowledges that research participants' interpretations of their experiences are limited by their capacity to explain their knowledge of an experience effectively (Baillie, Smith, Hewison, & Mason, 2000) and also reliant on the researcher's capability to be reflexive and analytical (Smith et al., 2009). This method of analysis combines both the process of developing a rich description of a phenomenon and the development of an interpretative account (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Inescapably, analysis is the cooperative result between the research participant and analyst (Smith et al., 2009). IPA does not prescribe a single method for analyzing data but rather a flexible approach to analysis (Smith et al., 2009). However, an important condition of IPA is adopting an idiopathic approach, meaning that each transcript is analyzed individually prior to condensing all interview transcripts for a group level analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Once the interviews were transcribed verbatim, analysis began with reading each transcript. Audio-recordings were re-listened to while following along on the transcript because hearing the participants voice provides a more authentic analysis (Smith et al., 2009). This first stage helped with centralizing the participants as the focus of the analysis instead of quickly summarizing complex information. Repeated reading of the transcripts invites a better look into the participants' experiences with the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). While reading, I also wrote directly on the transcripts any initial thoughts, ideas, and possible themes.

At every stage I reflectively logged my thoughts in a notebook of the data set in terms of my assumptions, judgements or biases that I became conscious of during the initial read throughs and free coding stage. This aided me to put aside or bracket my thoughts, feelings, and ideas for a while and it also allowed for returning to these notions at a later time (Smith et al., 2009).

The next stage of analysis was the most comprehensive and time consuming. Using a hard copy of the transcript and adding wide margins, free

coding was started, I expanded on my initial notes comprised of exploratory thoughts, feelings, and ideas and potential themes. Key words, phrases or descriptions which the participants used were highlighted. This set of notes is meant to be taken at face value (Smith et al., 2009) with a focus on the description of participants' overt meanings of their physical activity experiences. The goal is to develop a nuanced set of notes and comments about the data as these comments were used for the next stage of analysis. These notes include similarities, differences, echoes, exaggerations, and contradictions in the participants' accounts. Smith et al. (2009) assert that it is vital for the analyst to engage in "analytic dialogue" with each line of the text, by interrogating what a particular word or phrase means to them but also discovering what it meant to the participant (p. 84).

The third step concerned a more systemic approach to IPA. The third step in this analysis was the development of emerging themes in the data sets. This prompted a shift to analyzing the data notes rather than the actual transcript. The comprehensive exploratory comments and notes were analyzed to identify emergent themes. Interrelationships, connections and patterns between this set of notes were mapped and data details were reduced (Smith et al., 2009). This step aimed to develop brief statements of what was significant in the various notes.

The fourth step in this analysis was to look for connections between the emergent themes. I tried to see how emergent themes fitted together (or not). At this point, some emergent themes were discarded as the focus returned to the research question, how do underserved young women experience physical activity (Smith et al., 2009).

These steps are repeated for all transcripts, one at the time so that ideas are bracketed as far as possible from the following transcript or case to be analyzed (Smith et al., 2009). This is fundamental to IPA's idiographic method. The final step is to look for theme patterns across all cases. Each interview conducted (five) was analyzed individually and a cross analysis of all interviews followed. At this point, major themes and subthemes were developed.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the study was accomplished throughout data collection and data analysis. The use of multiple techniques increases the study's trustworthiness (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). In this study, I establish that I had worked in the setting and context of an underserved community for multiple years before conducting research in the same setting, and therefore acquired an in-depth understanding of the context. This helped to ensure that conclusions reached were not insincere. I was also able to provide readers of this study with rich nuanced description of the setting and context, which is important for credibility (Thomas et al., 2011). Further, I was able to manage researcher bias by engaging in reflexivity throughout the data collection and analyzing process. A notebook was used to write down any assumptions, judgements and biases so that those ideas could be bracketed throughout the data collection and data analyzing process. In the reflexivity section of this chapter, I reveal my various intersecting social categories that shape and influence my experiences with physical activity. By acknowledging my positioning in the social world and bracketing my biases, quality of the research is enhanced (Thomas et al, 2011).

Peer debriefing was used throughout this research. This technique is described as bringing “a new set of eyes to data and conclusions” (Thomas et al., 2011, p. 366). Peer debriefing involves someone who has knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated, physical activity, and who is an expert in qualitative research. This person examines the findings and questions the researcher to see if conclusions are concise. My academic advisor was the expert who helped guide this research study and aided with the credibility of the data and findings.

Even though transcripts were returned to the participants with the opportunity to clarify, omit or add anything that might be missing, this was not member checking in the sense that many may imagine it (Thomas et al., 2011). Member checking, the process of presenting the findings to the participants to confirm the analysis (Thomas et al., 2011), was not possible in this study because the research participants returned to school after a summer break and their busy schedules changed.

Reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher is the fundamental instrument of data collection, selection and interpretation (Finlay, 2002). Therefore, writing a qualitative text is not separate from the researcher's own interpretations of culture, gender, class and personal politics. In other words, qualitative writing is located within a stance and is representative of the researchers' experiences in life, values and biases (Creswell, 2013). It is important for qualitative researchers to acknowledge this and be self-disclosing in their writing (Creswell, 2013). This is a process called "bracketing" (Creswell, 2013; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). A level of integrity is established when the researcher prepares to engage in cautious, self-evaluation throughout the research process (Finlay, 2002). This negates the possibility of a piece of writing obtaining "privileged status" over other works (Richardson, 1994). However, complete bracketing is not possible, "phenomenological reduction does not involve an absence of presuppositions, but a consciousness of one's presuppositions" (Dale, 1997, p. 311). There is also the concern in regards to the impact that the writing will have on the participants (Creswell, 2013). In terms of this study, the participants could feel further marginalized, or perhaps offended. For instance, including the word "inner-city" in the title of the project, which could be found on the information sheet and consent form, was a difficult choice to make. I was afraid that the participants would choose not to share their stories and hide their lived-experiences as underserved young women because of the tarnished meanings attached to the term "inner-city". The writing also has an impact on the reader, who may understand the research in an entirely different way (Creswell, 2013). Reflexivity has been important to me throughout my master's thesis project. It is a technique I have included throughout the research process by critically thinking about my role as a researcher and my positioning in relation to the participants throughout the project and also through writing memos, which helped me be accountable for my thoughts, reactions and impressions of the data (Dale, 1997).

Reflexivity begins before the research idea is conceived as the researcher considers the topic and their relationship to the topic. At that point in time, researchers have the opportunity to consider their motivations, assumptions and interests in the research as a way to identify within them the knowledge, values

and beliefs that could possibly skew the research in certain directions (Finlay, 2002). Choosing my thesis topic was something I spent a lot of time contemplating. Yet, it is a topic that has stirred some passion in me in recent years, and so, it was an obvious choice to make.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the research idea was inspired by the time I spent working for a community-based organization (CBO) in an underserved community in a city located in one of Canada's central provinces. While at this CBO, I was tasked with coordinating sport and recreation for children, youth and older adults. The main responsibility was managing several youth community basketball teams which included the coordination of volunteer coaches, transportation, and other logistics. However, I gave that up to work on a specialty project which would only receive funding the one time. The focus of this project was to increase physical activity participation of young women who lived in the neighbourhood. Still, with increased opportunities to engage in a range of sport, recreation and exercise, the young women for which the program was designed, were not interested and lacked motivation and commitment. I have thought about this predicament for a very long time now and considered how to improve the program, but I have always searched for a deeper understanding of what and how these young women experience physical activity.

After much reflection and evaluation, I realized the program was based on how I imagined young women would like to engage in physical activity. But I neglected to consider how the experiences of these young women and the experiences I had as a young woman, are situated in culturally, socially and historically different places. This was another reason for adopting reflexivity throughout this research process. It is crucial that the researcher understand that them and their participants might not share the same assumptions and failure to do so, could lead to misunderstanding (Finlay, 2002). Reflexive analysis plays an important role in illuminating the influence of the researcher's position and perspective (Finlay, 2002). Needless to say, this experience shaped my research interests and my personal commitments to improve the opportunities and quality of physical experiences for young women who are situated in underserved communities.

That being said, it is crucial that the researcher be critically aware of their own positioning in the social world and in relation to the research (Fries, 2009). I have identified my relationship to the topic and the participants, however there is a need to describe how I am positioned in the social world in which the research is being conducted. I identify as a White, French-Canadian female of privilege. My privileged life has allowed me to play softball at the elite level, with many opportunities to travel to compete on the national and international stage. My gender has also shaped the way my experiences with sport and physical activity have been constructed. Having a little brother who played ice hockey also at a high level, I always felt less important than him. My father often bought him new equipment and offered to put him in development camps, opportunities I was not offered. Family gatherings were also painful because relatives would continuously ask my little brother about his successes and what opportunities were coming next for him, even though, I was the one representing the province in international competition, successes that, to my mind, merited more attention than him. My experiences as a female in the sport world, that is very much male-dominated, have shaped how I understand and have experienced the phenomenon and encouraged my feminist perspectives. I can honestly say that as a female I felt a sense of oppression because of my gender in the sport world. As I have grown older, I've also realized the impact of being white skinned in Canadian culture. The neighbourhood from which the participants were recruited, is ethnically diverse. Many newcomers to Canada live in this area as well as Canadian Indigenous peoples. Until I worked in this area, I had no concept of the degree to which the young people in this neighbourhood were underserved, including their opportunities to engage in physical activity. Growing up, there was visibly very few Indigenous girls playing softball at the elite level and no newcomers. I recognize that I have been more than privileged in my life, and that these privileges have influenced how I understand and experience physical activity. My experiences as a female in sport have also led me to recognize the oppression that young women face in the social phenomenon of physical activity.

I also come from a lone-parent family. Although, I do come from a privileged background, I have experienced a lack of emotional support in my physical activity pursuits. I'd imagine that for young people in underserved

communities this experience is amplified with many more constraints. My experiences with physical activity required that I not only have financial support but support from family members and the latter was minimal.

Having worked in an inner-city with young women in physical activity settings, I have ample insight and direct experience into the phenomenon. Yet, I regrettably never initiated in-depth conversations about their lived-experiences with physical activity. During the data collection process, I found that I was able to connect with the young women because not only am I also female identifying, or was in high school not long ago and can somewhat relate, but I most likely had a role in the physical activity programs in which they engaged in at the community center. Therefore, it was integral for me throughout the interviewing that I be reflexive and avoid comparing or trying to match my experiences to theirs and rather see their experiences as independent of mine and see these as new. Reflexivity was also crucial immediately after the interviews. My drive home from the research site is substantially long as I live in the country, and as I would drive, my thinking would be focused on the interview that just happened. As I would get home and store away the consent forms, and audio recordings, I would take the time to jot down several key moments about the interview. This reflection process was a way for me to stay close to the phenomenon I was examining, and preparing me for the next interview. Reflexivity has been designated as imperative in qualitative research, as it is considered to bring an element of authenticity to the research itself, the self and for the audience (Tracy, 2010).

Limitations and Delimitations

The participants of this study were young women who reside in an underserved community in a city in one of Canada's central provinces and this small sample size is not meant to be a representation of all underserved young women in this city, Canada or other areas of the world. Comparatively, this study used a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of these young women in particular. A further limitation presented itself during the recruitment process. Recruitment started during Canadian summer months when the young women were out of school until the Fall. During the summer months, the community center's youth drop-in programming runs on a different schedule

and therefore patterns of attendance change. Also, it was found that during the summer months, Indigenous families leave the urban context to stay with their families on their band's land. Therefore, recruitment of participants was low and slow. Moreover, potential participants inquired into *what's in it for them* for participating in the research study. The organization that occupies the community center and coordinates its programs feels it is important for the young people to be rewarded for their participation in activities or contribution to tasks, thereby creating an incentive culture. It seems that having an opportunity to share their views and be heard was not motivating enough to be a participant in this project.

Responses to interview questions were subject to the time of year and the seasons. It is conceivable that responses to questions about physical activity may have been different if the participants were interviewed during the school year, as they would have been engaging in physical education regularly and when they are out of school their routines change considerably. This is also conceivable for physical activity experiences during the summer months and winter months. In Canada, in any given year the weather will average a range of seventy degrees Celsius (+35 to -35). Canada has four distinct seasons, and each season enables, limits or precludes certain physical activities. This impacts young people's habits, routines and engagement at the community center and other extracurricular activities.

Delimitations include only focusing on underserved young women. They have been identified in literature as having less opportunities to engage in physical activity than underserved young men (Sabo, 2009). The recruitment of the young women was also confined to recruiting from a community center in an underserved community, because it was a space where they had opportunities to engage in a variety of activities including physical activity. The community center context was also an important structure the study wished to explore in relation to the young women's experiences with physical activity.

Summary

Premised on an interpretivist research paradigm and constructionist epistemology, the research utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews with six young women. The intention was to explore their lived-experiences with the

phenomenon of physical activity, using interpretive phenomenology as a guide for analysis.

The next chapter is the presentation of the findings of themes derived from an interpretive phenomenological analysis. The choice of research design was intended to generate an understanding of how underserved young women in a Canadian inner-city experience physical activity.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I foreground the voices of the six young women interviewed. I tease out the key themes from these conversations. Themes derived from the interview data will be presented as major themes and supported by subthemes as a result of a cross analysis conducted based on the interpretive phenomenological analysis procedures discussed in chapter three (Smith et al., 2009). The major themes were 1) Attitudes Towards Physical Activity 2) Supports 3) Constraints 4) Gender Discourse 5) Centrality of the Body in Physical Activity. Each subtheme will be described in detail using the words of the participants. In chapter five, these themes will be discussed in relation to the literature.

4.1 Attitudes Towards Physical Activity

The participants demonstrated a range of attitudes towards physical activity based on their lived experiences with the phenomenon. They described experiences that were pleasant and unpleasant, experiences where an element of competition was favorable and at other times not. They described physical activity as something of important consideration and sometimes not, and also portrayed physical activity as an integral part of their emerging self. Below I flesh out the subthemes using the voices of the young women.

4.1.1 (Un)pleasant Physical Activity

Participants discussed both pleasant and unpleasant instances of engaging in physical activity with a variety of factors impacting their experience. Pleasant experiences were described as fun and generally as informally structured activities. However, the more structured school-based physical education classes drew mixed feelings about physical activity. Participants discussed both positive and negative feelings regarding physical education. Other kinds of self-directed physical activities like doing a workout or walking on the treadmill stimulated feelings of hate for the activity and boredom.

Most of the young women relished informal physical activity with a group of friends, especially when they could interact with their physical environment. For example, when asked what she enjoyed about physical activity, Bernie declared,

"cause it's fun running around and hiding in the bushes ad what not". When asked about alternative ways to pass her leisure time, such as playing on her Nintendo game, Bernie explained that the excitement of evading other game participants was what led her to prefer informal physical activity:

No. Cause it gets boring, and with manhunt, you get the thrill of keep running away from people and it's fun. (Bernie)

The physical education context provides ambiguous feelings about physical activity for some participants. One participant discussed her experience on the school basketball team and the adversity of engaging in conditioning exercises. However, her attitude shifted when she noticed that her efforts were rewarded:

Well everybody was there because they like basketball and they wanted to be on the team. So, depends on what she's doing like at the beginning I really could not run and at the end I could actually like run for a long period of time without getting tired. So, it's a good thing but like... Like in the end we're obviously going to see results of like how I change and stuff. (Erica)

Erica provided further insight into unpleasant experiences when her physical education teacher was directing them do the challenging conditioning that Erica indicated in the previous statement. She explained that although she enjoyed the conditioning aspect of playing basketball, her physical education teacher's approach to the class created feelings of heartlessness.

No I liked it, but she pushed us. Like I would literally run like 10 minutes straight and if anybody stops, she would add two minutes on. She was not giving us no mercy. (Erica)

This approach discouraged Erica from going to her physical education class on a regular basis. However, she indicated that there were attractive aspects to physical education that created positive attitudes toward physical activity.

I used to ditch gym class all the time. ...Just cause some of the things they would do like sometimes, like she'll do like 25-minute jogs and stuff like that and I was just not feeling it cause I hate running, so I was like nah.

But when it was game days, like soccer, basketball, volleyball I would like go for that cause I actually like playing that. (Erica)

A different participant had trouble justifying being uncomfortable and challenged when she could have been enjoying something else:

I hate working out, I'm not going to lie, I hate running I hate everything that has to do with working out.... Like everything about it, it's just like too hard. Like what's the point of running when you can just sit and enjoy your burger. (Danika)

Boredom experienced during physical activity was another unpleasant experience that impacted attitude towards physical activity:

Thing is, I don't mind. Cause I told you I have a treadmill at my house. Like I try going on the treadmill, I'm not tired, I'm just bored. I literally get bored, it's not that hard for me you know. I just get bored, so it's like, I'm not going to see results today so why do I keep doing it, I don't know. If I had motivation, like actual, actual motivation I would do it more, but I don't really have motivation. Like you need motivation to actually do something like to go your all, so that's what's lacking. (Erica)

When Erica did find the motivation to take part in physical activity, she decided to ignore the advice from her peers, which was to take it easy when she first started out in the weight room. Neglecting this advice, she found herself experiencing delayed onset muscle soreness which took away her motivation to continue on this positive health behaviour path:

People usually tell you, like go slower. You know. So, you can get your body used to it. I don't care about that. I usually just go all in and the next day I'm sore and can't even move and then that's how it ends. So, like you're supposed to ease in it but I just jump in it. Cause I'm impatient. (Erica)

In many instances in the interview data presented above, physical activity was conceptualized as the act of running. However, dancing was a popular way to enjoy physical activity by a couple participants. When asked about the difference

between running and sweating and dancing and sweating one participant stipulated that running was an activity that she felt obligated to do in certain circumstances and therefore it was not enjoyable. She also attempted to signify by repeating herself that dancing was something that she relished and this was the principle difference between the two activities.

Well you're enjoying one and the other you feel forced to do it, where you're like 'ugh, I don't wanna do this', you know? But the other one you're like enjoying yourself. It's cause you're enjoying it (laughs).
(Danika)

When Fran was asked if she ever spent time in the gymnasium part of the community center, she replied that the space was never available for her to use and that the young men left a stench behind causing an unpleasant affect:

No, it's stinky. They always play basketball, like all the boys and it always smells so gross. ... they play basketball as soon as the doors open. The doors open at 6:30pm, and that's all they do and they're on there until 9:30pm. It smells bad. (Fran)

Attitudes toward physical activity varied depending on the kind of physical activity and the context in which it was done. When the young women were required to do conditioning exercises, it was evident that this was not always a pleasant experience. However, when the young women engaged in informal physical activity of their choosing, attitudes were more positive and enjoyment was experienced.

4.1.2 Competition (Un)welcomed

For the participants, there were times in the physical activity context that the spirit of competition was welcomed and other times when it led to a negative outlook of physical activity. To a couple of participants, competition was part of their drive and motivation for engaging in physical activity:

Like even though I'm not good at something, I'll be like, 'Imma beat you at it'. Like I know that I'm not good at soccer, and if someone's talking about soccer I'll be like 'I'll beat you at it'(laughs). I don't know I'm very competitive. (Erica)

I just like physical activity, I like running around, I like engaging with other people. Then again, I'm competitive so I like being the best. (Carla)

Carla identified in the previous quote that she was a competitive person, and that competition was an important element that drove her passion and participation in sport. In the statement below she explains that she looks forward to potentially playing university level basketball in the United States, because she perceives that particular university league to be of competitive calibre, something that she believes better suits her personality:

I rather do it in the US. ... In the US they push you more, and the US is a little more aggressive then here in the city. And they show you a little more and the US is a little bit more involved with basketball and a lot of states promote basketball. So, I feel like it's somewhere for me to be. (Carla)

When asked about her closest teammate, Carla suggested that too much competition can drive a wedge between her and that teammate:

Umm, it can be good but it can also be bad because we can get overly excited and too competitive and it turns into too much like a game instead of having fun and enjoying ourselves. And it's about who's better. (Carla)

In Carla's experience competition in the sport setting can be unmotivating and result in the opposite fashion of a team working together and rather turns into a team with athletes working towards individual goals instead of a common goal.

When playing elite, everyone's being competitive and playing for themselves and it's not as much 'that's my friend' it's more 'that's my teammates'. (Carla)

Other instances in which competition in the physical activity context was unwelcome were times when the parents of opposing teams were overly excited and this caused a rivalry that impacted the athletes on a personal level. Competition in this sense was discouraging for Carla:

Sometimes when I play basketball, there are other competitive parents from other teams. And when we were losing they would encourage us to

miss a shot, or [when] we would mess up as a team they would cheer that and clap that and so seeing that or people putting me down and telling me I'm not good enough yet or you need to do this, and not worry about that and telling me how I should play the game, I guess makes me feel like I shouldn't be playing. (Carla)

For Danika, competition in the physical education context was a deterrent to engaging and developing a positive relationship with physical activity. She described that when students were trying to out run one another to prove who was a faster runner, she felt a sense of embarrassment and humiliation that made her feel like her physical skills were inadequate. She recognized that not everyone was able to perform as well as the fastest runner in the class and identified the notion of being expected to keep up as problematic.

Umm, maybe if they let us go at our own pace. You know cause like everybody is so into like who's first, and like who's running faster and stuff like that and it just feels like a competition. But when it's like "oh they're a slow runner" then it's like embarrassing type of stuff. So maybe if it was more fitting for us, like more...like if it was more, like if we could run at our own pace and we could do us when we're running that time, then yeah. But if it's like "you gotta run fast, you gotta keep up with them"... Cause like everybody's body type is different and some people handle stuff differently, but they expect you to like be at the same level as everybody else when you're like at a different level. So that's like the only problem. (Danika)

4.1.3 Physical Activity is (Not) a Priority

Participants were asked if young women should make physical activity a priority, and the responses varied. One participant explained that physical activity such as walking should be a priority, but physical activity that required a person to exert themselves and elevate their heart rate was not always necessary to achieve health. She then contradicted herself by saying that jumping and skipping should be a priority which are exercises that require more physical exertion than simply walking.

I feel like to a degree it should be, it should be, not, mm this is kinda tricky. It should kinda be a priority like walking that would be physical exercise, right. So, stuff like that. It doesn't have to be something serious like they have to go to the gym all the time, right. Just as long as you're staying healthy. Walking, jumping, skipping rope, skipping down the streets (laughs). Just stuff like that I think that should be a priority. (Ayan)

Another participant emphasized the importance of making physical activity a priority. She made the link that when a young person was not being active, they often resorted to reaching for their phone and not being active at all.

Yeah. Because we need to participate. When you don't participate you go on your phones and do nothing then you won't get enough exercise.
(Bernie)

When considering their own priorities, for a couple of participants, physical activity was secondary to more pressing issues like school.

Uh, I don't know I just stopped. School is stressful like, when you start failing classes, you just really don't have time for sports and stuff like that.
(Danika)

For Erica, physical activity was not a priority because she encountered many barriers that did not make it easy for her to engage in physical activity. She also mentioned that physical activity was something she would make it priority in the future. She was adamant that at her age, there are things in her life that require greater attention than participation in physical activity.

I feel like I could do better, but. I feel like I could be more active but, in the future, just not right now. ...Cause like I just don't have the right equipment.... If I had a car, then some days I would just go to the gym! But like that's in the future though. ... Like it depends on the time period like where you are in life right. There's stuff that needs to be focused more on. You know? I feel like in the future I'll be more active. (Erica)

To some of the young women, physical activity was regarded as an important thing to take part in and should be considered a priority. For others, physical

activity was not considered important at this point in their lives because other responsibilities demanded greater attention.

4.1.4 Sense of Self

Having a clear sense of who you are and where you are going was a supporting factor for engaging in physical activity. Carla spoke in particular about physical activity as something that was simply part of her identity. She described that at young age, with the influence of her father, it was something that was part of her everyday life. Through taking part in sports, she came to understand herself, her capacities, developed a sense of self and awareness of certain personal attributes she brought to sport context.

I just think that it's easy for me to be active, cause I've always been surrounded by the nature of running around and playing sports. Like my dad used to be a soccer player back in my home country. So, I grew up around that nature and I've always just done sports. (Carla)

I like skating, and I'm a competitive person. So, combining the two, like that's the sport of hockey. You're skating and you're competitive, very aggressive. I feel like when I'm feeling competitive, I get aggressive, so hockey seems like a sport that would suit me and my personality. (Carla)

Erica also related to Carla's sense of awareness about the self. Through sport, Erica understood that she could be a determined person and achieve the goals she set for herself.

I'm that person who's like, very, like if I want something I go and get it. Like I'm gonna go for it, you know? Like I'm gonna be like "I'm gonna go to the gym next month", I go to the gym. People usually tell you, like go slower. You know. So you can get your body used to it. I don't care about that.

This theme captures that for some young women, physical activity could be an avenue for developing a physical identity and deeper understanding of the self.

4.2 Supports

In this section I explore a theme representing the types of support most prevalent to the participants in this study. Subthemes will detail the structures and

people identified by the young women which positively influenced their engagement in physical activity.

4.2.1 Support and Motivation from Peers

According to the young women in this study, support from peers in the physical activity context was important for exploring new ways to move, and overcoming inhibition. Ayan reconstructed an experience when peers enabled her to take part in physical activity:

We motivate each other. Then we can do new things together. So, if you're trying out something new, you don't have to be shy about it cause this other person can also help you out with it and you can be like "OK, is this how I'm supposed to do it?" (laughs). (Ayan)

Performing physical activity in an environment with peers of the same gender was motivating and supportive. Ayan emphasized that being in an environment of entirely young women when she was trying an activity for the initial time, was conducive to a positive experience.

You know what, I started kickboxing, and I feel like I was more comfortable when I was in an environment, it was an all-girls gym. So, it was really comfortable cause it was like, just girls. I mean if it was mixed it would be okay, but for me going into a sport like that for the first time ever, all girls was really nice. So all-girls would be really good just like if it was a new sport. ... I went with two friends. (Ayan)

Erica identified that different groups of peers encouraged different ways of engaging in physical activity:

It depends, like on what type of friends I'm with. I'm not trying to be racist but like, when I'm with Asian people, I tend to do physical activity more. ... And when I'm with black it's like (shrugs shoulders, laughs). ... We definitely dance. ... It's cause Asians, like, they're really competitive into sport. And like I used to, like my Asian friend, we used to go to her house and we used to play basketball and I used to 'verse' her like I used to be really, really competitive. But then like, I don't know it just depends like who you're with. (Erica)

When asked whether they preferred to exercise in a group context or on their own, Danika and Erica insisted that a group of friends was the best option for them. They emphasized that the presence of friends motivated them to stick with the task. Otherwise, Danika asserted she would be tempted by the idea of a siesta, resulting in no exercise at all.

In groups. Cause when I'm alone I just I'm just like... I could take a two-minute nap, which turns into hours. ...You'll just make excuses on your own and there isn't someone there to push you to do it, you know? ...You'll let yourself off but others will be like 'just come on, you got this, keep like going'. (Danika)

Cause in groups you're more motivated and you're just bouncing off each other's energy so it's more likely for you to actually keep on going. And if you see others doing it, like I'm the kind of person who like, if I see someone running at 5 miles, I'm gonna run at 6 miles. ...Yeah, I just gotta be ahead, you know? (Erica)

What would make me go, is if like, one day, her and I are just like "OK let's go to the gym", cause I'd really like to go with my friends, it's more comfortable, and were motivating each other and were benefitting off of it you know? (Danika)

Below, Bernie echoed that friends were a crucial aspect for engaging in physical activity. Bernie explained that when she was visiting a city unfamiliar to her, she did not participate in any physical activity because she did not know other young people there. She explained that the moment she returned to her home city she was right back to her regular physical activity routine with her peers.

K like when I went to [this town] I stayed inside all day cause I was really bored and I didn't want to make new friends. And when I got back to the city I was running around with my friends and what not. (Bernie)

In contrast to other participants, Carla took advantage of the moments in which she engaged in physical activity by herself. She perceived these moments as opportunities to challenge herself and be reflective because she recognized that the presence of peers was not always conducive to productivity.

It's lonely but I feel like I can focus better and I don't have a distraction. Because when I'm with my friends, we're always making a joke, or were not taking things as seriously. So, when I'm by myself I can push myself further, and focus on myself, sometimes it's good to be independent and do things on your own. (Carla)

In summary, for many young women, peer support was an essential element to their physical activity pursuits. It helped them overcome nervousness in environments that were unfamiliar and intimidating. Different groups of friends also encouraged different ways to be active. For one participant, exercising alone was seen as an opportunity to focus on improving her skills as opposed to being distracted by peers.

4.2.2 The Community Center and Community Belonging

The neighbourhood community center was found to be central to the physical activity experiences of the young women who took part in this study. Whether it was organized programs in the gym, joining the community club's team sports, taking part in other programs based in the center or using the community center's yard as a meet up spot for friends to organize themselves to play a game, the community center was evidently an important space for supporting physical activity participation. This was especially the case for Bernie, who consistently referred to the center when asked to tell about the ways in which she engaged in physical activity:

Well I guess physical activity is running around outside or maybe participating in activities that they hold at the community center, like volleyball or tag or like what we were doing in rotary, dodgeball. (Bernie)

Sometimes if were bored, we scooter to the 7/11 or scooter around here and go back to the community center. (Bernie)

The community center was central to Bernie's physical activity pursuits, even when the center was closed. When asked to recall a specific time she was active, Bernie described playing a game around the community center building, in the middle of the night. This signified a sense of belonging to the community and safety in a space so familiar to her, beneficial to pursuing physical activity.

Well we were playing manhunt, or it wasn't even manhunt it was cops and robbers or something. And we started off with a cop and we were all robbers. And he was like "OK go, you guys run and I'll count" and we all started running. But we were all hiding as well. So, he can tag us. We all just came up with this game of cops and robbers and manhunt mixed together. ...Yeah, around the whole community center at night. (Bernie)

The community center also represented a place to engage in a variety physical activity both formally and informally:

Sometimes when we go to the community center and play basketball, we play games against each other. Or the community center has a program where a guy comes in and teaches us different things and tries to teach us different basketball movements and tries to teach us different aspects of being basketball players. So yeah, we do that sometimes, and other times we sit around as friends and just play cards. (Carla)

For young women who do not take part in organized sport as part of a team, the community center was key for joining a pickup game of some sort.

For me I never really like, participated in sports and stuff like that. But if I'm in programs like at the community center and stuff like that, I'd be playing basketball, soccer, volleyball stuff like that. (Danika)

When asked to consider how she felt about her community basketball team and her elite basketball team, Carla made the case that her community basketball team fostered a greater sense of camaraderie, important to success on the court, compatible with the previous section on peer support. The community sport context, allowed her and her teammates to spend time together and strengthen their relationships and from this, a sense of community belonging supported her engagement in physical activity:

I prefer community ball. Because when I play with my community ball friends, it's like we choose to be a team. And we're not forced, we want to be a team, we work as a team. We hang out off the court and spend time with each other and that just creates a bigger bond and it's easier for us to work together on the court. (Carla)

This subtheme recognized the impact that the community center made in the physical activity pursuits of young women who reside in this underserved neighbourhood. When young women took part in physical activity at the community center, a sense of community belonging emerged and this further supported their engagement in physical activity.

4.2.3 Range of Opportunities and Choices

Many of the participants suggested that opportunities for both organized and unorganized physical activity were important. Below, Danika made the case that organized sport was important for ensuring inclusivity:

I prefer organized. Cause there's like a team and everything and it's already like, you know, prepared.... it's like for real, for real. And then when it's not organized, people exclude you or there's no teams and people just aren't passing. But when it's organized, the coach will make sure that it's getting passed around and stuff. (Danika)

The same participant also reflected on the ways in which she engaged in physical activity informally. For instance, she described walking to the store and she and her peers would incorporate little games to make walking more enjoyable.

Even if the bus stop is like 30 minutes away, we'll still walk to it just to like, you know. And we would do little things like who can get to the store quicker, and just do little stuff like that. We dance a lot, that's one thing we do. (Danika)

Dancing was a popular way to get some activity in to the lives of two of the young women interviewed. Dancing was seen as an accessible and enjoyable way for them to move at any point during the day and also as a way to burn calories.

(Laughs) Umm it depends you know, it could be at the club, at the club dancing, or at parties right. Or events where they have dance you know, like Salsa Sunday at the Spot and we all go and we dance. (Ayan)

Honestly at the end of the day it's all dancing. Dancing can be anywhere. ... Getting ready for work, getting ready to go to a party, getting ready to go to an event, you know a concert. (Ayan)

You know twerking, takes like, it burns a lot of calories. (Erica)

Carla's participation on an elite basketball team allowed her to broaden her physical activity opportunities. As a participant on such a team, she had the opportunity to travel and play against teams she's never played before:

My favourite thing about club team is that they don't keep you within the city. They try to give you an outlet to show yourself in other places. So, we travel to the north of the province or go out of the province and seeing different provinces or territories. And you get to show yourself and prove yourself to other coaches.

Leadership roles in sport also supported Carla's engagement with physical activity. Carla viewed coaching as a way for her to be supportive towards other participants:

I want to be a coach and being a coach, is more than being a coach. It's about teaching them discipline and teaching them how life is, and it's more than just a sport. (Carla)

In the physical education context, Erica admitted to hiding in the locker room to avoid engaging in physical activity she disliked and waited to come out to be a part of the activities she did enjoy. The variety of options, encouraged her to participate in something without completely avoiding her physical education class.

Yeah, cause like for me the only reason I don't ditch class is cause, after she did all that, like the 25-minutes jogs, you like jog 2 minutes and then sprint 1-minute straight. And that would kill us. But the only reason I stayed is cause, at the end, you get to play basketball, like a game. So sometimes what I would do is hide out in the change room and just come out when it's time to play the game. (Erica)

When discussing the programs offered at the community center, Fran was encouraged by the variety of activities available to her but also appreciated that she was able to leave at any point to go enjoy taking part of activities outdoors if she liked.

Yeah like, you don't have to stay inside you can go out whenever you want. (Fran)

The young women interviewed, recognized that physical activity did not just have to be organized sport or programs. They understood that opportunities such as dancing, walking and being outdoors constituted as physical activity and they took advantage of those moments to enjoy being physical. This theme made it clear that a range of opportunities was necessary to support the young women's engagement in physical activity because as was evident, each young women's enjoyment of physical activity was dependent on context and peer support.

4.2.4 Establishing and Reaching Goals

For some young women, setting a goal for themselves was a reliable way to ensure they were taking part in physical activity. Carla envisions herself playing basketball at the university level while she works towards her career aspirations and so she recognizes the need to continue playing and improving to realize this goal:

Well my goal is, to play basketball for as long as I can. Here in Canada you can only play university ball for up to five years. And me personally I do not wish to do basketball as a career, and after I'm done school, I would like to take basketball throughout school and I would like to be a surgeon. So, I feel like basketball is an outlet for me to get where I need to be. So, I'm going to keep pushing myself to get where I need to be and play basketball when I have time. (Carla)

For other participants, reaching a goal and relishing in a sense of accomplishment, geared them up to pursue more physical activity so that they could experience that feeling again:

I feel skinny as hell (laughs). I swear to god, I just be tired and be like 'oh I did good'. So, like that.... You feel like you have more energy, and you feel like you need to do more. (Danika)

Like it feels good. Like especially if you know you worked hard and you went to your full potential you just feel good like you accomplished something. (Erica)

Reaching a goal, served as positive reinforcement and encouraged them to take part in the activity again. Establishing goals helped the young women maintain the behaviour needed to be successful.

4.3 Constraints

The young women in this study experienced many more constraints than they did supports. This theme explores the constraints most regularly expressed by the young women during the interviews.

4.3.1 Characteristics of the Outdoor Environment

The physical environment, outside the confinement of perceived safe indoor spaces, was found to be a barrier inhibiting the young women's ability to be mobile in and around their community. The young women were cognizant of the dangers of their neighbourhood such as gang activity and violence and this prevented them from taking part in physical activity, especially if they found themselves outdoors alone.

Yeah, I like coming to the community center or the recreation complex. But I don't like going to spaces where there's not that many people around cause this neighbourhood is known for gang affiliation and different assaults and stuff like that. So, I don't really like going to the park unless I'm with friends. (Carla)

I wouldn't go for a run in this neighbourhood by myself. Unless it was during the day time then I would. (Carla)

Erica echoed this fear of the possibility of a violent encounter when outdoors in this neighbourhood. She discussed that if she lived in a more affluent neighbourhood where people can be seen jogging or taking their dogs for a walk, she would be more inclined to do physical activity because of the perceived safety in those kinds of neighbourhoods:

If I lived in like, not gonna lie, those areas that are rich ... I would literally take walks. Cause like I've been there, like there's people I know who live there, and you go there and you just see people like running, like going on walks or walking their dogs. But when you live downtown... you don't

really see people going on jogs, if you go on a jog, something might happen to you. So, depends where you live. (Erica)

I mean, there's a lot of dangerous stuff that happens here. Like you might get kidnapped, you know. ... But like, if you live in those areas where it's more safe, I would definitely go on jogs, like I don't mind. (Erica)

When asked what would encourage them to take part in physical activity in the evenings:

I think if there was patrols, and people walking around at night and more street lights. (Danika)

Danika emphasized that motivation to take part in physical activity outdoors had a lot to do with the behaviour of others in these outdoor spaces.

It's a lot the motivation too. Like if you see a lot of people going on jogs, or runs or stuff like that, you'll be like oh I'm going to do it too cause their doing it, and if you don't see it a lot then you just don't think about it. (Danika)

That being said, I asked her what she thinks about parks and if she used them for recreational purposes. Her honest answer also reinforced her previous comment regarding mirroring people's behaviour in the neighbourhood:

Blaze. (laughs) Imma keep it a hundred, I'm gonna be honest. We just chill and blaze. (Danika)

When asked where she would ideally exercise, Danika suggested a private studio so that she's out of the public's view.

Like a little studio. Like a private space where you can work out on your own. You know? Not like a public setting where there's a lot of people who can just look at you cause like yeah. (Danika)

Erica explained that the grimy appearance of the neighbourhood was also a deterrent. The sight of things such as a piece of rubbish on the ground was unmotivating to her. She would prefer running in a space that looked taken care of in terms of its appearance.

Even if you're like running and you see dirt on the ground you don't feel motivated. ...Not dirt, I mean like litter, like garbage and shit. I don't wanna be running in no place with garbage. Or muddy and like dirty. I don't want to be running there. I want to be running in like a clean, nice place. That's what I mean, like I don't know what downtown could do.
(Erica)

When she discussed making her way over to the community club to meet up with her friends for a game of manhunt, Fran described her walk over:

It's a little scary though. ...I just have anxiety and it's scary sometimes but yeah. (Fran)

When asked if she considered going for walks to other areas in the neighbourhood other than the community center:

My parents don't let me. It's not safe. (Fran)

In contrast, Bernie, expressed no fear of the neighbourhood environment which she attributed to her sense of community belonging. When asked if she felt safe playing a game of manhunt in the middle of the night she replied:

Yeah, it was fun. ...Yup it's my neighbourhood and I grew up here. I kinda know everyone, mostly. (Bernie)

Bernie aside, the safety concerns and grimy appearance of the neighbourhood created constraints for these young women to engage in physical activity outdoors and at times prevented them from getting to programs at the community center.

4.3.2 Perceived lack of self-competence

Self-competence is a person's perceived ability in a certain area. In the case of this study it refers to one's sense of being able in physical activity. For the young women in this study, their perception of a lack of ability to perform physical skills represented a significant constraint.

When asked if she would join a sport team, Ayan was convinced that her inexperience playing a particular sport in a team setting meant that she would most likely never take part in this sport.

I feel like yeah when I was growing up if I had more girls that wanted to play, but it was always the boys who wanted to play. I'd play with them a little bit and then I'd just go away. But now it's different there's a lot of girls, but it's kinda like I'm too late. It's too late so I don't feel comfortable. (Ayan)

Ayan explained that she believed that she has not acquired the right skills and confidence to play and repeated that "it's too late" for her. She also provided insight as to why other young women might not engage in physical activity in a fitness center setting.

They feel like, 'I don't know how to use these machines', and 'I'm kinda shy there's a lot of people here'. That's why. (Ayan)

Bernie revealed to me that she'd like to improve her skills in various sports, however without probing for further details, she exclaimed:

I just don't want to be on a team though. ... Cause I'll fail!... Whenever I'm on a team I suck, but when I'm playing by myself, then I'm OK. ... I get stressed and I'm nervous. (Bernie)

Bernie was explaining that in the team setting she perceived herself to lack confidence in her sport skills, however on her own she believed she performs them well.

When a different participant was asked about her sport skills, she explained that she felt confident. However, similar to Bernie in the statement above, in the team setting Erica would rather not be part of the action. She also explained how she felt when she played with other young women compared to playing with young men. She admitted that when playing with young men, her confidence disappeared.

Hell yeah. Even if I'm not good at it, I'm just going to be confident. But this is the thing, if I'm put on a team with really good players, I just feel like don't pass me the ball, cause I'm going to ruin it for you guys. So, I don't know, it depends who I'm playing with. I'm not gonna lie, like if

I'm playing with guys, I'm going to feel less confident. But if I'm playing with girls then I feel very confident. (Erica)

To one participant, her self-competence was linked to how she felt about her body. She explained that at times she felt as though she lacked confidence because of her body shape and ability to perform in the sport context. At other times, she ignored these negative feelings and found the confidence to engage in physical activity anyway.

Cause sometimes I feel insecure about my body and stuff like that, when it comes to sports. And sometimes, I'm just like "F it, just do it" (laughs). (Danika)

A participant also discussed a time when someone else did not have confidence in her. Erica felt that her physical education teacher did not have confidence in her sport skills which almost resulted in her not continuing on a basketball team.

Honestly, I felt, like, fuck you bro. (laughs) But I still made it! Cause she was helping the coach pick the players, and I know she didn't want me on the team cause she was like "oh this girl is slow, she's bad at skills", but I still made it, so sup? (laughs) (Erica)

In contrast to other young women in this study, participant Carla demonstrated self-competence and was praised for her talent. Her talent inspired others to learn from her:

Like I've had people tell me like "Oh how do you play as you do?", and I just tell them "Oh I practice, practice and practice". And they say "how do you practice and how can I practice", so I'm guessing they ask me and they get the information and they go do it themselves. (Carla)

Carla's self-competence drove her to work hard and master a few skills. She felt confident enough that she could coach her teammates through skills which she believed will only improve her team's performance on the court. Her competency also encouraged her to reflect and evaluate her next moves:

Yes, because working by myself, and can work on myself, and my moves and what I feel like I need to work on. And then once I learn I can teach

my teammates after and we can all grow as a team. And sometimes it's good see yourself play and just think about yourself for a little bit and see how you can improve in the sport. (Carla)

A young woman's self-competence or lack of, often determined the extent to which they took part in physical activity. To some, lack of confidence stemmed from inexperience of performing a physical skill. For others it was the pressure of performing in the team context and for others was their body insecurity or the presence of young men. Having competence, led one young woman to share her talent with others.

4.3.3 Cost of engaging in Physical Activity

Most participants mentioned the financial cost of physical activity, reporting that engaging in physical activity could be costly and that they were dependent on support from free options, deals and grants to be able to participate in activities. These youth then internalized this aspect of participating in sport and that brought them stress. In Bernie's case, her engagement in physical activity revolved around the community center, she understood that the programs and activities that she took part in are dependent on funding and that without it programs were discontinued. When asked about what else her community could offer her in terms of physical activity, she provided suggestions however was reluctant to imagine other fun activities she could do:

Yeah, I guess football, or trampoline parks, but we have no money.
(Bernie)

When considering the past ways in which she was engaged in physical activity, Bernie mentioned that her scooter was broken and can no longer be used. When asked if it was going to be replaced, she says:

No, I can't afford it, too poor. ... I bought one for ten dollars at a garage sale once! ... It's a good scooter, It's a back-alley scooter. (Bernie)

When asked about an ideal sport program for youth in her neighbourhood, Carla mentioned that cost should not always fall on the youth's parents, because in her experience, her family has not been able to financially support her in sport programs season to season.

...like me I don't come from a family that has that type of money to be paying for a program all the time. (Carla)

When asked where she liked to take part in physical activity, Ayan enthusiastically mentioned that one of the ways she engaged in dance does not cost her anything:

Or events where they have an event about dance, you know, like Salsa Sunday at the Spot and we all go and we dance. It's free! (Ayan)

A different participant mentioned the expensive cost of joining a fitness facility and the appeal of promotions such as free trials in these facilities that lessen the burden of cost:

Also, what motivates me, is when its free, like "Oh, our gym is free for two months" and stuff like that. Cause like, nobody really wants to pay for a gym membership. Like \$54 dollars a month like no. Like if it's free then it's like OK it's a free gym membership and you can just go workout, you know? (Danika)

The cost of engaging in physical activity was a consistent constraint for many of the young women in this study. Program subsidies and grants played a role in the physical activity pursuits of these young women, and they understood that without it, physical activity in which they take part would not be a possibility.

4.3.4 Social Exclusion

Social exclusion was found to be a prominent constraint for these young women to take part in physical activity. In the quote below Ayan suggested that opportunities for young women are restricted because of exclusionary practices of male peers and that a slight form of exclusion, like not receiving a text message invite, denied young women the access to play basketball even though the space was available for whom ever.

I feel like there's opportunities for both of them but like girls, don't really go for it. Cause guys would text each other "Hey, meet up here", "let's play ball here", right, and like they're not really going to text a girl and be like "Hey, let's play ball here". So, there's always open gym and girls can

go and play. But they kind of, I guess they kinda shy away from that, or they feel uncomfortable to play against guys. (Ayan).

Erica described several instances in which she felt excluded during physical activity. A couple of these instances occurred while she was playing for a basketball team and she was not being passed the ball. Erica described frustration with her teammates when they attempted to make a play and failed to succeed because they did not use her as part of the play. She also discussed that when she was being excluded, she felt that her time could be spent elsewhere where she could have been doing something else more enjoyable to her. Erica also described times when her brothers would not actively include her in a soccer game and this led to boring experiences with physical activity.

Because it's like the team members weren't even like... I don't know ... It's just like they never even shared the ball and it's like "OK". So, it's like I'm not going to waste my time when I could be having fun or something I don't know. (Erica)

Like they just didn't pass the ball and it's like I could have made that shot in but you know you just wanted to try it but it didn't go in, so...(Erica)

I mean at that time I was just living with my brothers, I don't have sisters, I would just watch them and sometimes join in. But I wasn't really into it because nobody would pass me the ball. ...I was just there, like what is this. And I was just bored so I would just be there. (Erica)

Danika expressed that she anticipated being excluded from a game because she may not appear athletically inclined, and this prevented her from taking part in physical activity.

Sometimes it's like the setting. Like for example, I don't know, but sometimes I just feel like I'll be excluded or that I'm not like fit for it or something you know. (Danika)

To Carla, being socially excluded or unwelcomed and disgraced in the physical activity context helped her find motivation to work harder at her physical activity pursuits:

To me, knowing that I have haters, or people who are negative towards me lets me know that they're looking. So, I know that they see me. So once I'm just going to push harder and they make me want to push further and doing something with myself and once I do, they will know "oh she actually became something, she's successful now, maybe I shouldn't have shot her down because now look where's she's gotten now". And so, it makes me feel like I got something to prove to them. (Carla)

The subtheme summarized that social exclusion can be subtle or explicit, and still deeply impact the ways in which young women engage in physical activity.

4.4 Gender Discourse

This theme represents the ways in which the young women of this study understand and communicate their place in world of physical activity. Gender norms and facets of masculinity are discussed by the young women and identified as impacting their lived experiences with physical activity. Moreover, the young women also spoke in a resistant way about gender norms imposed on them because of they are female.

4.4.1 Gender Norms

Gender norms played a significant role in the physical activity experiences of the young women of this study. In their interviews, the young women described that their peers or program staff of the same sex were seemingly disinterested in physical activity and this was rather consistent for them:

I feel like they already have a lot of those opportunities given to them. But it's more like do they want to, like do they chose to go or not. Cause you know I always ask them to, but they go "Oh you know not today, not today, but tomorrow". From my experience from the girls I've been around, they have all these opportunities but they just don't go for it. (Ayan)

I don't usually play with the kids, but I used to always play with the staff. ...like Jim. Cause none of the female want to play basketball. (Bernie)

One young woman holds her parents accountable for her lack of engagement in physical activity due to their expectations of her as a female, from an immigrant family, compared to male family members:

They have a lot of expectations from females. Like you gotta be home after school, cook, clean, you know stay home, don't go out but guys can go out. Their standards are just 'whoa'. Cause their living in like the 80's and so they don't really understand our generation and how we need that quality time to go outside. Or they don't understand that we come here just to live their lives again, or to live out their dreams type of stuff like that.
(Danika)

Danika understood that because of her gender, young women are automatically construed to be less able to perform well in the physical activity context and these notions made it easy to say no to physical activity opportunities:

You're seen as weak, people just see you as more weak and men are seen as more strong so it's like if a guy plays a sport and the girl wants to play the same sport, it's like "No you can't play" because you're not really on his level type stuff you know. So, it's always kinda like, for females it's always harder when it comes to sports and stuff like that, cause people are expecting them to fail and everything, so females are probably just thinking like no, cause there's so much expectations. (Danika)

As a result of these kinds of experiences, the young women acknowledged that by default, they felt like their participation in physical activity was not as important as the participation of males in physical activity:

I don't know it's like, you just feel like you don't have to do it more. I don't know. Cause it's like guys are more hyped up. (Erica)

Still, one participant contributed to the endurance of the stereotype by describing that professional female basketball players were perceived as not as strong or as tall as the professional male basketball players, and therefore were unable to make impressive plays on the court like men could:

Most women can't dunk, honestly. So, it's not like that interesting they just shoot threes, they not that aggressive. Like most of them aren't, but guys, they're like aggressive and most of them can dunk. (Erica)

4.4.2 Masculinity

Masculinity refers to the set of characteristics, behaviours and roles related to men. A typical behaviour observed by many of the young women in this study that impacted their participation in physical activity was the notion that young men take up space and dominate physical activity spaces. Many of the participants expressed that local gymnasiums were constantly taken over by young men playing basketball, which gave the young women a reason to avoid these male dominated spaces.

A lot of guys just say 'Come to St.M'. So, it's that school and they have open gym. And there's at least 30 guys that just pull up and they all know each other; they all know everyone there and they all go to play basketball. It's packed. And like, I haven't went there yet, I kinda wanna come but (laughs). (Ayan)

Ayan's laugh indicated that she felt too shy and intimidated to go to this space because it was male dominated. When a different participant was asked whether or not she thought males would stay or leave if they walked into a gym packed with young women playing basketball, she maintained that they would most likely stay to play, confirming that males dominate these spaces.

I feel that boys, they might still play, and they might play where the girls are and kick them off. Sometimes it may not be intentional but sometimes it can be. (Carla)

It had been experienced by the young women that males often want to uphold their supposed superiority in sport settings, and intentionally dismiss a female's presence on the team to guarantee themselves success. For Erica, this resulted in increased pressure to perform and also recognized the double standard that men are permitted to make mistakes and be redeemed however young women have one chance to prove themselves physically:

Like when my brothers played soccer, they would just never pass the ball to me. I'm not really telling them to but it's like come on. You don't really feel that involved, cause they wanna win and they feel like they have a better chance of winning with a guy on their team then you. (Erica)

It's never really that deep for me though, like unless I really really like a sport, cause like basketball, when we play boys vs girls and there's one girl on the team, I actually like, they actually pass the ball to me, probably cause I'm taller. But other sports like soccer, like I don't even try. I'm like what's the point. I'm not gonna get that ball. There's no point. Especially if you're on a guy's team, you're just like (shrugs shoulders) and if you make like one mistake, you feel like they're never going to pass the ball to you again but when they make mistakes it's okay. It's like, all eyes are on you type of deal. (Erica)

The young women described how they perceived young men's skills to be superior to their own in physical activity spaces such as a fitness center. There was an assumption by these young women that young men were more capable of using their bodies physically and also that they physically used their bodies differently than young women:

Actually, I would like to see what it would be like to go with a guy to the gym. Like that would be so interesting. ... But like going to the gym with a guy, that would make me go. I feel like I could, like I'm competitive. If I see somebody doing something, I want to be doing that too! So, I don't know I just feel like I would be motivated more. Cause if they're more fit, then I just try to do the shit they're doing. (Erica)

One participant contended that because her male peers physically appeared a certain way, that they must have known what they were doing in the context of a weight room:

Cause I look at them (laughs). I see them working out and also like I've seen that they actually get results. So, the guy friends that help me out, they're fit, they play football. They have like almost body builder bodies,

I'd assume that they know what they're doing. And they work out like every day. (Ayan)

Ayan in particular expressed that she spent a lot of time in a gym and felt confident about her skills in a weight room, yet she still sought the help of her male peers for guidance in this setting.

Very confident, like I know what I'm doing. ...But I usually workout with someone who knows what they are doing. ...Like a lot of my guy friends, they help me. Like if I wanted to lift weights and stuff. They tell me 'Okay Ayan do this, do that. You're doing good'. (Ayan)

4.4.3 Resisting Gendered Expectations

When Carla was asked if she thought that young women experienced physical activity differently from young men, she stated that this could be the case however she did not put herself in that category. She was adamant that she did not let gender stereotypes play a role in her physical activity pursuits:

I would say other women can, but personally I don't. I do not let the fact that I am female get to me. I just play the sport I would as a person and not thinking about my gender or what I identify as I just the play the sport how I would like to or how I can and with my potential. (Carla)

When asked about the gymnasium space at the community center being preoccupied with young men, Carla drove the point that the presence of males does not bother her:

Yes I see that there's all, well not all, but a good percentage of the population is males. And I feel like females may not feel like they're up to the standards of males or they feel uncomfortable playing in front of males. But me I play cause I want to play I don't play to prove anything to them, I play to prove it to myself. (Carla)

In the physical education context, Danika recognized gender discrimination by the teacher and expressed anger instead of letting it go:

I feel like, that's very unprofessional on her part, cause she's a teacher, were supposed to look up to her. She's supposed to like, you know, give

us a view of the world and all that, not be out here saying like ‘oh you’re weak, cause you’re a female, cause you were born a female’, like no!
(Danika)

A different participant also referred to having been doubted in her physical activity pursuits because of her gender by a physical education teacher. However, in a moment of overcoming perceived ability by her teacher, the teacher acknowledged her accomplishments which Erica perceived as due to outperforming the young men in her class.

But, one time in the academy, we all had to do planks, and I outlasted like even the guys, and she was like “Good job”. I don’t know like, when people doubt you and then give you praise for what you’re doing, it feels better than someone who’s always been there encouraging you. Do you know what I mean? (Erica)

4.5 Centrality of the Body in Physical Culture

This theme focuses on the idea that the physically active body is an instrument used to achieve a particular appearance, attract certain attention and communicate specific notions about the self.

4.5.1. Body Aesthetics

Many of the young women, admitted that they exercise to achieve appearing a certain way and this required bodywork through physical activity. They were motivated by the idea that their appearances would change to look a certain way:

To be more fit and to tone. I don’t exercise to exercise; I exercise to tone my body and to like lose weight in certain places. Or to get bigger in some places, I don’t know. (Erica)

I want to look good. I want to look good. I wanna have that type of like, cause I know I have that figure that I want. And it’s right there you know, just that extra little fat, I just need to shape it and then it’ll be there, cause I have it I just need to work hard to get it and show it and that’s what motivates me to exercise. (Ayan)

Cause lifting weights, that's gonna help everything. That's what I want. I wanna get bigger thighs and everything like that. ...There's other ways, but lifting weights is going to make it faster (laughs). (Ayan)

The same participant from the preceding two quotes repeated herself throughout the interview, indicative of her true motivations, excitement and reasons for engaging in physical activity:

To look good. I mean I'm gonna be honest, I want people to look at me and say 'wow, she looks good'. (Ayan)

When asked how she liked to exercise, Danika, who mentioned feeling insecure about her body in a previous theme, focused on full body workouts:

Most of the time, I just like work on all of my body. I don't have like a certain day, you know how people have like a leg day, arm day. ...I do like all. (Danika)

4.5.2 The Male Gaze

Another attribute adopted by young men was the act of the male gaze which can discourage young women from taking part in physical activity. Ayan explained that in certain spaces where she engaged in physical activity, her body became objectified especially if she was wearing certain items of clothing, and this attracted attention, especially if she was the only young woman there.

If I wanted to wear specific workout clothes, like shorts or something you gotta be careful with that cause some boys are like that and some are not you know. Same thing with like, if you want to just wear a sports bra, specific gyms you have to be careful cause some people are just really annoying. But yeah, and you kinda become the center of attention too. If you were the only girl playing basketball against the guys, to them it's just kinda like 'whoa'. (Ayan)

Ayan discussed how males made her feel uncomfortable and unsafe in physical activity spaces. Again, she mentioned feeling objectified because of certain features the bodies of young women of her ethnicity have. In these physical activity spaces, she perceives that males are gazing and that they were making jokes at her expense:

Of course, guys will make you feel uncomfortable a little bit. For me just being black and a lot of girls from my culture have that figure, and other black girls also have that figure too not all but a lot of them do right. And that's what people know us for. It's just a thing, it's just a thing people do. Yeah so like if you're the girl there in the room, you know everyone's looking at you like that 'oh look at her'. ...It makes me feel a little uncomfortable cause it's like.... guys will joke around too much, and you gotta set boundaries. (Ayan)

The young women also said that they would prefer exercising in private rather than being watched by others if they chose to run in public on the streets. The neighbourhood in which they live is densely populated and they dislike the idea of people watching them while engaging in physical activity, especially if by someone they knew.

It's like, I don't even like being watched while I'm jogging. So like downtown there's a lot of people (laughs)...like people you know and you're just like (rolls eyes, laughs) oh my god you know? (Erica)

4.5.3 The Body on Social Media

Social media is a space where the body is highly scrutinized because they offer visual platforms. Using social media and posting photos and videos allows people to dissect the body. Ayan explained that when she posts on particular social media platforms, people viewed these and sought her advice in regards to how they could work on their own bodies.

People who see me working out like on Instagram and more before on Snapchat, they ask me, "K Ayan, what's your workout routine?" "Ayan, can you please help me do this?" and they ask me questions about working out and they just come to me for stuff like that. (Ayan)

Social media had a direct impact on Ayan's motivation. She explained that when she saw fitness models on such platforms, she was able to deduce which models had real bodies compared to bodies enhanced by cosmetic surgery, and this motivated her to seek out inspiration from models who appeared not to have gone

under the knife. She also liked the attention that these models attracted to themselves:

Like I see a lot of these like fitness girls right. Yeah, I get a lot of motivation from them. Or a lot of these Instagram models. But I know the ones who actually have real bodies. So, I look at the ones who actually have real bodies. ... A real body for me is nothing with surgery (laughs). Cause I've seen girls who get surgery, and then they start working out afterwards and then to their audience they're like "Omg she got that body from working out?!". But she actually didn't. So, it's false hope and just false motivation. So, I look at girls whose bodies look real to me, cause I know the details of an actual body. Right, and I can see the progress that they made and it fits, right. So yeah, I just look at that and it really motivates me cause they look good, they look nice you know. They're getting a lot of attention. (Ayan)

Ayan further described a fitness model on Instagram she considered her physical activity role model:

She's a model. But she's also like a motivational speaker a little bit, she's very positive. And I just use her. ...She's darker skinned yeah. And her body is just so nice. And it's real, she has like the dimples it has everything. ...Yeah like when I tell people I want a body like that, that's why I gotta eat more cause I'm tryna get a body like her. (Ayan)

Erica echoed Ayan's concerns about Instagram fitness models' bodies that were not considered 'real' to them due to cosmetic surgery and the false messages the models were sending:

Like that's inspiring and all, but most of them get plastic surgery. And they like take a video that they're like working out in, but they're not really working out (laughs). (Erica)

Erica also found inspiration from watching transformation videos, where a person's body changes over time because of physical activity or other ways of manipulating body weight. She stated that these videos could help her find the motivation to encourage her to start her own transformation journey:

But like if you see somebody transforming, like I love watching transformation videos. ... And it just like motivates you. Like at some point you just have to find that spark in you.... You can see them on like Instagram or like YouTube. (Erica)

Other participants were also finding information about how to move their bodies and do bodywork from online sources:

There's like, you have to go online and you find workout routines. And then you find a routine that works for you. ...And you keep doing that routine if you like it. And if you wanna switch it up you go back online again and find a different routine. (Danika)

Summary

These findings were derived from an interpretive phenomenological analysis to better understand the lived experiences that young women who are situated in a Canadian inner-city neighbourhood have with physical activity. Five major themes were articulated by the young women's voices. These were: Attitudes Towards Physical Activity; Supports; Constraints; Gender Discourse; and Centrality of the Body in Physical Culture. Themes were supported by the participants voices. Direct quotes offered meaning that confirmed themes. The following chapter is dedicated to in-depth analysis of the findings in this chapter. Drawing on a social constructivist and feminist perspective, in the next chapter I expand on what has been similar and in contrast to past literature. I also focus on the key matters that stood out in relation to their lives situated in an underserved community.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings generated from five interviews were denoted in five themes, representative of these underserved young women's experiences with physical activity. The five themes were 1) Attitudes Towards Physical Activity 2) Supports 3) Constraints 4) Gender Discourse and 5) Centrality of the Body in Physical Culture. This chapter will deliberate these findings further, highlighting the similarities that have been previously found in the research on young women's experiences with physical activity. Odd and isolated comments will also be brought to the fore in this analysis. A focus will be placed on themes that stood out in connection to their lives as young women living in an underserved community. Social constructivist and feminist perspectives will inform analysis.

Broadly speaking, this study's findings support many aspects of previous research focused on young women and their experiences with physical activity. Some of these similarities include reference to the scope and nature of physical activity supports and constraints. As previously found, young women who live in underserved communities have less opportunities to engage in physical activity (Sabo, 2009), including in the physical education context (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). It was unsurprising that the study's participants disclosed many more constraints than supports.

I begin by discussing what made physical activity (un)pleasant and considered (un)important. I also explore the young women's perspectives on what comprised the main supports and constraints to their participation. This will be followed by discussion on gendered discourses with which the young women engage. The body as a focal point for young women's engagement and disengagement in physical activity will be discussed as well as the impact of social media and the ways it influences how they understand the body and health-related information.

Attitudes

(Un)Pleasant Physical Activity

Participants' lived experiences with physical activity included visceral affects that accompanied their participation and impacted their attitudes towards

the phenomenon. People are subject to a constant stream of experiences, (Rosenbaum, 2000, p. 53). According to Williams, Dunsiger, Jennings & Marcus (2012), affective responses of engaging in physical activity can signify further motivation or deter people from taking part in physical activity. It is thought that people who sense pleasure and enjoyment are likely to continue participating. If displeasure or discomfort is sensed their chances of doing that activity again is diminished (Ekkekakis, 2009). Affective associations were both enabling and disabling for the participants of this study. When Erica was asked to explain her reasons for not going to the fitness center consistently, she explained that the pain she felt in her body the day after a tough workout was enough to keep her away from the weight room for a long period of time and that this reoccurred in cycles, “I’m sore and can’t even move and that’s how it ends”. Similarly, Danika described how much she detested exercising and running when she could have been doing something more pleasant, like “enjoying a burger”. Danika’s strong feelings of displeasure minimized the chances of her engaging in physical activity. However, these same young women also discussed times when they felt pleasurable affects as a consequence of engaging in physical activity. Danika derived pleasure from “feel[ing] skinny as hell”, and also from feeling tired and energized simultaneously and these affects motivated her to continue engaging in physical activity.

Feeling “pushed” because of working “hard” was also sensed by participants. Carla’s intuition signalled to her that physical activity was a path that could help her achieve her goals. “I feel like basketball is an outlet for me... I’m going to keep pushing myself”. Bernie described physical activity as fun because it was an opportunity to be social with friends and this was experienced as an enjoyable way to combat the feeling of boredom. Physical movement enabled these participants to experience physical activity via an “emotional expression or cathartic release” (Garrett, 2004, p. 235).

Fran described a sensation she associated with physical activity differently from other participants. She remarked on the smells of the gymnasium at a community center where the drop-in program took place. “It’s stinky”, “always smells so gross”, and “it smells bad” are the words she used to explain the stench left behind by the boys as the reason she did not participate in physical activity in

the gymnasium. Olfactory senses contribute to the experiences of any given location (Sparkes & Smith, 2012). For Fran, the smell in the gymnasium prompted emotions and judgements linked to displeasure which deterred her from approaching that space at the center (Grenier, 2013)

Fran also discussed the emotions she felt on her way to the community center to take part in physical activity. She described feeling scared and anxious because of the conditions and bad reputation of the neighbourhood. In order to engage in physical activity, she needed to overcome these feelings or else they held her back from taking part in programming at the center. This was also sensed by Erica when she said “something [bad] might happen to you”. Engaging in physical activity outdoors or getting to the local gymnasium elicited feelings of fright and anxiety for these young women.

Physical Activity is (not) a Priority

Discourse can be defined as wide-ranging communication by all meaning-making action whether deliberate or not (Kirk, 1999). Neoliberal discourse repositions society in such a way that citizens are urged to become keen, motivated, productive individuals responsible for constantly improving themselves, contributing to the economy and making wise choices about their education, career, and health (MacDonald, 2011; O’Flynn, 2010). Neoliberal discourse was embedded in the young women’s attitudes towards physical activity. Bernie was certain that physical activity should be made a priority by young people otherwise “you go on your phones and do nothing then you won’t get enough exercise”. She recognized that, for her, not engaging in physical activity was an irresponsible behaviour. In line with neoliberal discourse, a person’s inability to show good citizenship behaviour is deemed deviant, lacking and in need of improvement (O’Flynn, 2010). Bernie demonstrated a recognition of the neoliberal requirement to work on one’s own health and that it was up to the self to fix or remain on the path to health (O’Flynn, 2010). Erica also adopted the notion of ‘self-management’ and contemplated that she was falling short of the ideal physical activity behaviour when she said “I feel like I could do better”. She found herself positioned as a non-marketable product (O’Flynn & Peterson, 2007), and so, felt guilt and defended her reason for not engaging in physical activity by naming several barriers that constrained her from being a good citizen.

She understood *how* to become an ideal and successful neoliberal citizen, but was unable to fulfil this notion. By repeating “in the future” three times, she asserted that she *will* be a responsible citizen in the future. Both Bernie and Erica adopted neoliberal discourse and used it to make sense of their own and others' positioning against the status quo of acceptable health related behaviours (O’Flynn & Petersen, 2007), yet sensed that they were falling short of what was expected of them as individuals.

Some participants also expressed that physical activity was simply not a priority because it “depends on ... where you are in life”. As Danika disclosed, she was failing classes in school and therefore improving her grades was a priority over engaging in physical activity. This disruption in her engagement did not signal disinterest in physical activity but rather that for her, it was not a crucial undertaking at that point in time (Quarmby, 2014). Quarmby (2014) contends that the value of physical activity in young people's lives “should be placed in context with the wider circumstances of their lives” (Quarmby, 2014, p. 955). Still, Danika’s desire to work on her grades in school was reflective of striving for being a successful neoliberal subject. Walkerdine (2003) contends that the “multiple self is an impossible fiction” (p. 241), meaning that holding up to the standards of the ideal citizen in many aspects of life at once is not possible. Given this, one could question the need to panic about adolescent inactivity like so many professionals do (Sallis, 2000; Hohepa, Schofield, & Kolt, 2004). Rather, adolescence is a complex time and physical activity should not necessarily have to be a top priority for all young people (Wright, Macdonald, Wyn, & Kriflik, 2005).

O’Flynn and Petersen (2007) would argue that neoliberalism desires individuals to feel a persistent sense of obligation to conduct themselves in ways that will improve their health and wealth, yet the young women in this study eschew this directive via their constant reference to engaging in physical activity for ‘fun’ (Walkerdine, 2003). Being with friends and focusing on having collective enjoyment rather than taking part in something for added value to one’s life, negates neoliberal notions of constantly working on a marketable self (O’Flynn & Petersen, 2007). As will be signalled in the following section, peers were an integral form of support for young women’s engagement in physical activity.

Supports

Friends to Be Active With

As prior research has suggested (e.g. Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Sleaf & Wormald, 2001; Garrett, 2004; Humbert & Gibbons, 2008; Casey et al., 2009), support from peers was found to be a very important factor in shaping the young women's inclination to engage in physical activity. They experienced peer support as not only important for exploring new ways to move, but as an enabling factor in overcoming inhibition. Garrett (2004), drawing on a feminist poststructuralist approach, found that an opportunity to be simultaneously active and social was a strong motivator for young women's participation. Her research pointed to the camaraderie and solidarity amongst young women which prevailed when they engaged in physical activity in groups. This was echoed by my participants when they described a preference for taking part in physical activity with groups of friends because it was fun, energizing and motivating. Hearing "come on, you got this" from supportive peers was understood to be a motivating reason for showing up and making an effort. Ayan described that having a female peer at her side during a workout in a weight room or a fitness class was integral to her perceived self-efficacy. She also explained that she would feel more willing to engage and take part in an activity for the first time if she had a friend at her side. This was similar to the sentiment expressed in Yungblut and colleagues' (2012) study, where participants who were in their early adolescent years indicated that they were more likely to try new activities if they had a friend with them. Some participants mentioned that if friends were not available to participate in activities with them, they would completely forget the idea and move on without considering alternatives to pursuing the activity. Peer support was crucial for the young women's engagement in physical activity.

Parental influence has been found to be a strong form of support for young people's engagement in physical activity (Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010; 2013; Quarmby, 2010), yet participants in my study rarely mentioned the influence or support from parents in their physical activity pursuits. With the exception of one participant, who identified her father as a role model, no other participant indicated their parents or guardians as coming close to significantly influencing their engagement in

physical activity. Some participants described that their immigrant parents held particular views about what young women should be doing with their leisure time and that physical activity was not at the top of their list. Danika, whose family immigrated to Canada when she was young, explained that her parents expected her to be home after school, to help with the cooking, and cleaning and to stay home while the boys in the family were encouraged to be outdoors and take up a sport. As Statistics Canada (2014) reports, children of recent immigrant parents have higher risks of low physical activity levels and this was especially so for young women because of gendered expectations (Kay, 2006).

Role modeling by parents, has been previously found to be an effective way to promote physical activity and shape knowledge about health for children and adolescents (Trost, Sallis, Pate, Freedson, Taylor & Dowda, 2003) especially by mothers (Quarmby, 2013). Some participants described observing their parents or guardians engaging in physical activity in the form of walking, usually to the grocery store, yet they were not necessarily role modeling or promoting and exploring different ways to be active and sustaining engagement in physical activity. Comparatively, research suggests that young people experience less parental influence as they get older, and young women between the ages of 13 and 15 spend more of their leisure time with friends than they do with parents or guardians (Zeijl, et al., 2000). The lack of parental influence, in my cohort's experience, could also be explained by the notion that parents from lower social class have less explicit ideas about how young people should be spending their leisure time compared to parents from higher social classes (Zeijl, et al., 2000; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013). Parents and guardians of children from lower social classes potentially lack the time and dollars to invest in their children's leisure pursuits (Zeijl, et al., 2000). In other words, the structural conditions of these young women's family lives limited their opportunities and choices for physical activity (Quarmby & Dagkas, 2013; Quarmby, 2013). Rather than engaging in formal, resource intensive sport programs, informal or spontaneous physical activity was described as the most enjoyable kind of physical activity for the participants of this study.

Dissimilar to the other participants in the study, Carla divided her physical activity time between peers and practising her sport by herself. As much as she

enjoys having fun and making jokes with her friends, she declared, “sometimes it’s good to be independent and do things on your own”. Zeijl et al. (2000) may refer to her desire to participate independently as signalling her positioning in a period of transition between adolescence and adulthood - a sign of development and maturity. As Carla described it, the time she spent playing basketball by herself was time spent reflecting on her development as both a person and as an athlete. She spoke about playing basketball as an “outlet”, or a path for her to take to accomplish goals she has laid out for herself. These goals include playing basketball at the university level with the confidences that it will provide her with scholarships so that she can study at the same time and work towards her career aspirations of becoming a surgeon. Her individualist tendencies need not be understood as meaning she was opposed to interdependence (Raef, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000, p. 71), but rather perhaps as a strategy to enact neoliberal notions of productivity and self-responsibility to benefit her own needs and imagined future. Carla understood herself to be a product that constantly needed work, development and improvement (O’Flynn & Petersen, 2007, p.470; O’Flynn, 2010). Further, as both collectivism and individualism are forms of support for engagement in physical activity for Carla, they can be understood as co-existing.

For Carla, physical activity was enabling in terms of social capital with her sport skills. As suggested in previous literature, social support for people who are socially disadvantaged is hard to come by (Burton et al., 2003). Carla talked about how other young people who have watched her play basketball ask her how they could be as talented as her and followed up by providing them with tips on how to better their own skills. Her athletic skills led to the development of peer relationships. In line with Bourdieu’s theory of capital, a person’s resources can be traded or shared in a social space, like the community center, for gaining social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Unlike other participants in this study, Carla was able to use her skills as a resource for making friends who also wanted to play basketball which, in turn, supported her engagement in physical activity.

A particular comment stood out from the rest during a discussion of peer support. Erica identified that the kind of physical activity she engaged in was dependent on the peer group she was spending time with. She started by saying that she did not intend to make a racial comparison, however went on to explain

that when she spent time with friends who were Asian, it was more likely that she was playing a sport because they were “competitive”. She also explained that when she was with her coloured friends, it was more likely that she would be taking part in dance. “I don’t know it just depends like who you’re with”. This finding supports what Fine (1987) describes as an *idioculture*. Idioculture can be described as a system of “knowledge, beliefs, behaviours and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis for further interaction” (p. 125). In a study investigating female youth subcultures within a recreation center in a Canadian city, it was found that different subcultures existed among the female users of the center. Each of these subgroups held different beliefs and enacted behaviours similar to others within the particular subgroup (Wilson, White, & Fisher, 2001). The notion of idioculture can be found among female youth within physical activity contexts. Identifying this factor suggests that diversity in physical activity choices is important for young women, and can help increase their participation in physical activity (Eyler, Wilcox, Matson-Koffman, Evenson, Sanderson, Thompson, Wilbur & Rohm-Young, 2004). McCulloch, Stewart and Lovegreen (2006) argue that for young people in these kinds of areas of disadvantage, it is probable that they would engage in subcultures because the choices available to them are limited by cultural and structural elements. As it turns out, Erica’s lived experience with physical activity involved diverse female identity groups that enabled her to engage in a range of physical activity.

Range of Opportunities and Choices

Having a range of physical activities to choose from and being able to have input into these activities was found to be important to the young women in this study. This was comparable to existing literature on the matter (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Yungblut et al., 2012; O’Sullivan & MacPhail, 2010; Hill, 2015). Although organized sport was enjoyed by some participants, for reasons like perceived fairness during play (e.g. “the coach will make sure that it’s [the ball] getting passed around”), informal ways of being physically active were preferable for most participants. Informal activities allow participants to modify and control the balance between skill and challenge (Mandigo & Thompson, 1998). Participants were also more likely to be

intrinsically motivated to engage in informal activities because they made the decision for themselves to participate as they regard it as worthwhile and enjoyable (Mandigo & Thompson, 1998). Experiences with physical activity described by the study participants as the most pleasurable were those informal activities that took place outside the organized setting and included dancing, manhunt, and pick-up basketball. These findings resonate with Garrett's (2004) study where engagement in physical activity was described as pleasurable when it took place outside of the school-based physical education context.

Dancing in particular was regarded as an enjoyable and accessible way to be active by the participants. The participants perceived dancing as a form of activity that could be done anywhere and anytime. Ayan described that she could dance “getting ready for work, getting ready to go to a party, getting ready to go to an event, you know a concert”. This perception contrasts with findings in Clark et al.'s (2011) study where adolescent girls held a narrow understanding of physical activity and did not consider dance to be physical activity. The young women of this study had a wider understanding of the concept of physical activity which accommodated their particular interests and preferred modes of engagement. As found previously, ethnic minority girls have favored creating dance routines as an enjoyable form of engaging in physical activity (Azzarito & Hill, 2013). Research has found that dancing is one of the most popular activities in which underserved young women take part in because it is regarded as something that is low-cost (Hancock, Lyras, & Ha, 2013). Other research indicated that dance has been used to attract and hook young people in community programming (Beaulac, Kristhjansson, & Calhoun, 2011). A developmental benefit of dance programs includes the opportunities for forming interpersonal relationships (Beaulac et al., 2011) which has been identified as super important for these young women. For Erica, certain kinds of dancing were also regarded as a way of shedding some pounds “you know twerking... it burns a lot of calories”. This comment was not surprising seeing as participants are preoccupied with exercising for their appearance. In this case the joy of dancing was infused with notions of weight loss and reduced to an aesthetics of the body (Clark et al., 2011). In the testimonies of the young women in this study, both weight loss

imperatives and the sheer pleasure of engagement in this pursuit appear to co-exist.

Similar to Flintoff & Scraton's (2001) study, dislike for the activities during school-based physical education was conveyed because the curriculum did not reflect their interest and did not offer a range of choices. In order to avoid the warm up portion of the class, which consisted of conditioning exercises, Erica self-confessed to hiding in the locker room until she had heard that the running component of the class was over. This was Erica's strategy for not completely missing out on physical activity, and participating in the parts that she liked. Participant Danika, explained that the expectations of the physical education teacher were problematic because it was perceived that all students, male and female, were required to perform at the same intensity. The nature of the activities and the physical education context was not ideal for this student (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). In so saying, the expectations of Danika's physical education teacher were high as opposed to low, unlike the experiences of Flintoff and Scraton's study participants (2001). It was also suggested that physical education teachers who promote sport-based curricula and fail to recognize the range of aspirations and motivations among the students, will be less successful than those who create safe and supportive environments (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001). Danika did make a suggestion for how teachers could create an environment that would be supportive and enjoyable. She suggested "like if we could go at our own pace and we could do us when we're running". Traditional physical education is still clearly disabling for many young women, suggesting that little has changed after decades of investigating the experiences young women have with the phenomenon (Clark et al., 2011).

Community Belonging

The community center in the neighbourhood in which the young women reside was found to be an important form of support for the young women's engagement in physical activity. The community center was a central organizational space that provided them with opportunities to take part in the drop-in program, the community sport program or other organized events. However, it was also viewed as a space where they could spend time with friends either inside or outside of the center and choose to take part in a program or

organize themselves to pursue their own entertainment. For participant Bernie, the center was where she could engage in games like tag or volleyball, but also engage in physical activity through her participation in “rotary”, a leadership program that often provides young people with a variety of experiences including physical activity. Apart from what was available for her in an organized fashion, she also used the center as a home base for gathering her friends to engage in a game of manhunt. She even used the community center as a departure point to scooter to the nearby convenience store only to return to the center and wait for something else to engage in. For Bernie, the community center was central to her physical activity behaviour, even when the center was closed. She described a time she played a game of manhunt in the late hours of the night. Her strong sense of belonging to the community (center) encouraged her to be mobile and also move her body in different ways. Participant Carla explained that the community center was a place for her to play pick-up basketball, take part in the programming in the gymnasium and also be a part of the community basketball team. Her lived experiences with physical culture include the friendships she made with teammates, especially those from her community basketball team, because the community center offered them a space where they could she can hang out off the court which helped strengthen their bond, which she said contributed to their success on the court. These positive assessments of the value of community recreation centers contrast with research that suggests recreational community spaces in underserved or marginalized areas are spaces that are generally perceived by young people (and parents) to lack options and be costly (Beaulac et al., 2009; Romero, 2005).

Accessibility of spaces within community centers, gymnasiums in particular, were perceived by young women to be problematic because they were dominated by the presence of males (Wilson et al., 2001; Beaulac et al., 2009). Although participants of this research also identify a male-dominated culture within the community center to be a constraint to their participation, they continued to return to the center for “something to do” or to “keep entertained”. The latter finding is comparable to Flintoff and Scraton’s (2001) findings that young women take part in physical activity because they understood it to be more constructive than meandering and doing nothing or Wright, Harwood and

colleagues' findings that suggest physical activity was an opportunity to catch up with friends (2005). The perception of safe adults within community centers located in low-income neighbourhoods was also found to be associated with more frequent physical activity by young people (Romero, 2005; Holt et al., 2009). Similar to Wilson et al.'s (2001), although the young women faced constraints, they continued to return to the center and sought other possibilities to be engaged. This was illustrative of their resiliency as young people situated in an underserved community and of the ways this community center and its physical activity options served as a key support in building that resiliency (Martinek & Hellison, 1997).

They demonstrated resiliency as they continuously made the decision, for themselves, to come to the community center as they recognized the risks that lie outside the parameters of the center and wanted to be engaged in the positive programs available to them. Like the young people in McEnvoy and colleagues' (2016) study who were situated in a disadvantaged area, they used physical activity as a way of staying out of trouble. Martinek and Hellison (1997) remark that resiliency is necessary for combatting the high-risk conditions of the kind of neighbourhood in which these young women live. They contend that resilient youth must be optimistic about their (physical activity) opportunities in life. By participating in activities at the center these young women were able to work on their social competence, including positive relationships with adults and peers necessary for taking part in sport or other physical activity opportunities available for them at the center and outside the center. Like the 'looked-after' children in Quarmby's (2014) study investigating place of sport and physical activity in their lives, these recreational activities offer this marginalized group "an opportunity to reintegrate into mainstream society and develop social networks" (p, 953). A second attribute for resiliency is that of autonomy, the ability to act independently and exercise control over one's environment (Gordon & Song, 1994). This was made evident when Carla seized opportunities to practice basketball by herself so that she could improve on her skills, skills that she hopes will take her through university so that she can pursue a career in the medical field. Carla's lived experiences with physical activity are entangled with her optimistic plans for her future. Bernie demonstrated a sense of autonomy when she planned for herself

and friends a game of manhunt in the middle of the night at a time when there was no organized programming available. Fran decided to take part in the youth drop-in programming of the day and went to the beach because “it’s something to do”. She exercised control over her lived experience by making the decision for herself to go on the outing without the influence of others. Similar to Wright, Harwood and colleagues’ (2005) study of at-risk young women, a community-based physical activity program that provides transport might be the only chance she has to engage in physical activity. Another feature of resiliency is a sense of hopefulness (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). Hopeful young people set goals and are persistent. They often overcome challenges and use outside resources for assistance including community centers (Martinek & Hellison, 1997, p. 39). Each of the participants in this study are registered participants of the youth drop-in program in their neighbourhood's community center and access the program as they wish. It is my interpretation that because of the lack of opportunities and safety in the neighbourhood the community center is, at least in part, a solution to that problem.

Constraints

Safety After Dark

The young women’s clinging to in and around the community center could be related to a constraint identified by them, pertaining to characteristics of the outdoor environment of their neighbourhood. The young women perceived the neighbourhood to be unsafe by acknowledging that gangs, assaults, and kidnappings were something to be worried about - “if you go on a jog, something might happen to you”. The threat of such an incident occurring hovered in their psyches and this impacted their inclination to participate in physical activity outdoors (Clark, 2015). Public spaces such as parks have been identified by Wilson et al., (2011) as spaces important for people in underserved communities because parks present a free and public space for many sorts of physical activities. Still, Carla described that she avoided going to spaces in her neighbourhood like parks, unless she was supported by a group of friends and still had daylight on her side. The study participants also indicated experiencing a fear of violence when it was dark out and this restricted their access and opportunities for physical activity (James & Embrey, 2001). Fran described her not so far walk between home and

the community center as “scary” and stirring within her some “anxiety”. When asked if she walked to other areas in her neighbourhood other than the community center, she was quick to answer that her parents would not allow her to, “it’s not safe”, shielding her from an environment where she may be at risk physically, sexually and emotionally (James & Embrey, 2001). Other participants mentioned that they would feel safer with increased lighting and patrols in the evening, suggesting that their participation in physical activity could increase if safety issues were resolved (James & Embrey, 2001). These perceptions of danger and risk are common in literature regarding young women’s participation in physical activities outdoors (Clark, 2015) especially after the daylight is gone (James and Embrey, 2001). James and Embrey (2001) noted that if physical activity after dark was available to them, the young women in their study went through the process of establishing the precautions required to be safe, or, unfavourably, avoided taking part in the activity all together. James and Embrey (2001) found that girls reported spending a significant amount of time at home once the sun sets.

Neighbourhood appearance

There is increased recognition that young people’s attitudes and inclinations towards physical activity engagement are affected by the spaces in which they spend time (Sandford & Quarmby, 2018). This was echoed when Danika was asked about her park usage and disclosed that she and her friends “just chill and blaze”. This was articulated after she explained that she does not see anybody in her neighbourhood going out for jogs or using parks for physical recreation and that if she did, she would most likely engage in some kind of physical activity in the area. For Danika part of the motivation to go out and engage in activity, would be to observe community members taking part in physical activities. Previous research indicates that frequently observing others in the community engaging in physical recreation is positively associated with one’s own participation in physical activity (King, Castro, Wilcox, Eyler, Sallis & Brownson, 2000). But this was not the case in parks in her neighbourhood, “if you don’t see it a lot then you just don’t think about it”. This can be related to the socio-economic status of the neighbourhood. It has been found that health-related behaviours can differ across socioeconomic groups (Turrell, Oldenburg,

McGuffog & Dent, 1999). Socioeconomically disadvantaged people have been found to be less likely to engage in recreational physical activity (Burton, Turrell, & Oldenburg, 2003). In this case, Danika's attitude towards the phenomenon was not encouraged, and therefore she was more inclined to engage in the recreational pursuits that she did witness in parks in her community, such as smoking marijuana.

Erica declared that she would engage in physical activity if she lived in a particular kind of neighbourhood. She explained that the sight of “litter” or “garbage” on the ground was unmotivating to see in her own neighbourhood and the idea of engaging in physical activity was unappealing. It has been found in previous literature, that people are more likely to engage in physical activity on their neighbourhood streets if they perceived their community to be aesthetically attractive, whether naturally or with built features and free from graffiti and rubbish (Sugiyama, Leslie, Giles-Corti, & Owen, 2009). Participation is also more likely if open spaces are well-maintained (Chen, Liu, Xie, & Marusic, 2016). This participant expressed a desire to engage in physical culture on the condition that the space had a clean appearance “I want to be running in like a clean, nice place”. She had previously observed people in a particular affluent, suburban neighbourhood engaging in physical activity, by going for jogs or walking their dogs, and this was found to be attractive to her. She conveyed that if she lived in this particular neighbourhood, she would do those things too. The active lifestyle witnessed by her in these affluent communities was attractive to her. Sugiyama et al. (2009) suggest that changing residents' perceptions of the environmental attributes, such as attractiveness, may lead to an increase in physical activity participation and contribute to overall active lifestyles of community members. Flintoff and Scraton suggest that “the environment and context in which physical activity takes place, needed to be right” (2001, p. 15). The lack of attractiveness and safety in the neighbourhood discouraged these participants from engaging in physical activity around their community.

Physical Activity as Too Costly

A consistent constraint experienced by the young women in this study was the financial cost of engaging in physical activity. They recognized that to do some of the fun things they have in the past or would like to do in the future

required financial support. Bernie understood that the activities in which she took part in at the community center were dependent on the funding the organization received. Without this funding, there were no programs or adult peers at the center for her to connect with. This could result in her engaging in behaviour that is non-productive (Witt & Crompton, 1996). Carla in particular was dependent on grant programs for her engagement in elite level basketball. Without this financial support her family could not afford her opportunities to travel with her elite team. She recognizes that being able to travel with her team and to play in front of different crowds gives her the exposure she needs to receive scholarships to play university level basketball.

The cost of a membership to a fitness facility was also found to be a constraint. Danika discussed that fifty plus dollars per month for access to a gym was too costly for her, however she showed her knowledge about promotions to these facilities and said that taking advantage of those motivated her to consider signing up. There was uncertainty, however, about how she could continue being physically active once the promotion was over. This was critical time for Danika's active self because she would not be returning to school. While in school, she had regularly scheduled physical education classes, but at the time of the interview she was in a period of transition out of the school system and it was unclear if and how she could be engaged in physical activity. Young people in transition out of the school context are put into positions where they are expected to continue to being active, but struggle to do so because of other competing demands such as employment and a social life, and they must decide if they want to allocate resources towards physical activity (Wright & Lavery, 2010). In Wright and Lavery's (2010) study, the cost of participation was "non-negotiable" and this was the case with Danika (p. 148). Wright and Lavery suggest that communities should provide a reduced cost for young people so that physical activity is more accessible to them (2010).

Gender Discourse

Stereotypes

Similar to previous research, gender discourse played a big role in the ways young women understood and experienced physical activity (Hill, 2015).

Gender norms have been found to exert a kind of control over young women's participation in physical activity and physical education in their daily lives and work to limit or encourage their participation (Azzarito et al., 2006). The findings of this study revealed that these young women have experienced being stereotyped but also made sense of other people's behaviour and their own positionings based on these stereotypes. The impact of this was deliberated upon by participants in several different forms. For instance, Ayan considered herself a regularly active individual, but declared that she has had trouble convincing a female friend to accompany her for a work out in a weight room at the local fitness center. She explained that the lack of participation of young women in physical activity was not a result of a lack of opportunities, but rather, female peers "just don't go for it", were uninterested and did not regard it as important (Azzarito & Solmon, 2009). This was echoed by Erica, who said "you just feel like you don't have to do it more [than boys]". In a study by Evans (2006), lower rates of female participation in physical activity and disinterest were explained by two points. Young women were deterred from participating in physical activity because of the pressure to not only look feminine, within a traditionally masculine domain, but to also show competency (Evans, 2006). Some young women, have been found to employ strategies to avoid taking part in activities by sticking to the periphery of the action (Azzarito & Solmon, 2009; Fisette, 2013).

Within gender discourse, making a mistake in the sporting context was perceived by Erica to be taboo if you are a female. There was greater embarrassment when a mistake was made by a female in the sport context than if it was a male who made one. Erica recognized the double standard because in her experience, when males made mistakes, it was not problematic and they were granted redemption for their error. In her own experiences, she felt embarrassment in these situations. This fear of being embarrassed caused her to retract from engaging in physical activity all together. Erica's engagement and enjoyment became depreciated because of the fear of making a mistake, seeming incompetent and drawing attention to herself resulting in judgement from others (Fisette, 2013).

The physical education context is a site for producing and normalizing dominant gender discourse (Azzarito & Solmon, 2009). Similar to Fisette's

(2013) study of secondary-school girls who identified gender related barriers perpetuated by their teacher in their physical education program, two participants of this study revealed that their physical education teacher was disseminating gender stereotypes. Participants in both studies felt irritated and frustrated with their teacher who showed more interest for the male students by providing them different opportunities (Fisette, 2013). Participant Danika showed her frustrations with the teacher by saying that she was “supposed to like, you know, give us a view of the world and all that, not be out here saying like ‘oh you’re weak, cause you’re a female’”. Gender discourse bestows power to males in the physical activity context, rendering females as weak and abnormal and therefore deviant (Garrett, 2004). Danika was aware of the unequal power relations this teacher was establishing among the students. Further frustration with this particular teacher was sensed when Erica had been made to doubt her physical abilities until she overcame a challenge and outperformed the male students. It has been found in previous studies that some physical education teachers held low expectations of female students and also were sarcastic about their level of skills (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001, p. 12).

Erica described other times when her skill level was undermined and expectations of her were low. When playing a pick-up game of soccer back in her home country with her brothers, she was never passed the ball and perceived this was because she is female and her brothers perceived her to not be a worthy participant because of her gender. This caused Erica a lot of frustration. From a different perspective, Danika discussed how in her own experience and observations, young women purposefully withdraw from a participating “because you’re not really on his level type of stuff” and “people are expecting them to fail”. Young women do not place themselves as equal with young men and adopt inferior positions to them. A sports-based physical education curriculum promotes male-competence, and as a result, young women do not have the opportunity to develop physical aptitude (Garrett, 2004). When Ayan was asked whether or not she could see herself playing on a recreational basketball team, she repeated several times “it’s too late”. Gender discourse thwarted her opportunity to take part in a lifestyle activity like recreational basketball. Because she never developed the appropriate skills during her adolescence, and was now too shy to

take it up because of her lack of skills, she believed she had lost her chance to enjoy playing basketball altogether.

Other findings in this research suggested that the young women positioned themselves as inferior to males within the weight room context. Hills (2006) contends that although young women “acknowledge inequalities” they tend to act in ways that carry out these gender power relations in the physical activity context, instead of challenging them (p.550). Two of the participants indicated that they felt competent when in the weight room, but still described that it “would be so interesting” to join their male counterparts in a weight room. These participants conveyed to me that resistance training was performed differently and was more intriguing when a male performed it. Ayan described that she liked going to the gym with her male friends because they helped her as they seemingly knew what they were doing. “Cause I look at them...I’ve seen that they actually get results”. These participants demonstrated that they were convinced that male bodies were better suited to perform physical skills than female (and able) bodies and consequently they positioned themselves as inferior to their male counterparts.

Other results showed that these young women reinforce sex-based expectations. Erica explained that she would never go watch a professional women’s basketball game if it was available to her because “most women can’t dunk honestly. So it’s not like that interesting”. She reinforced the gender stereotype that women were weaker explicitly saying that because of their gender, professional female basketball players were not capable of performing particular skills, like a dunk, and positioned them as inferior to the professional male athletes.

Resistance

A focal point of previous research (Azzarito & Solmon, 2005; Azzarito et al., 2006; Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Evans, 2006; Fisette, 2013; Hill, 2015) has been understanding the ways young girls challenge the gender discourse they encounter in physical activity contexts. Carla described that the male-dominated spaces in the community center would not stop her from practicing basketball or taking part in a pick-up game. To her, the gymnasium at the center was a space

where any gender can take part in physical activity. Carla explained that physical activity was always a part of her identity and played a large role in her life. Carla liked to involve herself in pick-up games even if they were dominated by males, showing some resistance toward the dominant culture.

Unlike most participants of this study, as mentioned before, Bernie described a time when she and some peers organized themselves to play a game of manhunt outdoors during late hours of the night, illustrating that spontaneous recreation after dark is a possibility for her. Being encouraged to explore their environment is something that young men experience more frequently than young women (James & Embrey, 2001). However, unlike young men, whose engagement in physical activity after dark can occur without much planning and without much consideration of safety issues (Lenton, Smith, Fox & Morra, 1999 as cited in James and Embrey, 2001), Bernie described playing this night time game of manhunt around the community center's park area and parking lot. Risk discourse, which frames young women as weak and vulnerable in outdoor spaces, takes away from the young woman's ability to make her own decision in determining for herself if these outdoor spaces are safe for them (Clark, 2015). Bernie's decision to stick around the community center, a space familiar to her, could be interpreted as her decision to stay safe but also as a form of resistance to risk discourse.

Clearly, gender discourse persists in physical education and other physical activity contexts and constrains young women's engagement (Azzarito & Solmon, 2009). Yet, this study provided two examples of resistance in such spaces. This suggests an opportunity to shift the margins of the gendering developments in physical activity contexts (Hill, 2015).

Centrality of the Body in Physical Culture

Reasons for engaging in physical activity

Distinctive in two of the young women's talk was the desire for a body that "looks good" and engaging in physical activity for the purpose of achieving a particular physical look. To these young women the body was important to their physical identities. They showed awareness of cultural ideals of a desirable body and consequently saw themselves as lacking (Garrett, 2004). This notion can

sometimes limit the young women's engagement in physical activity such as in Danika's experience. Danika described not feeling "fit" and so she considered herself unworthy of being included in organized games (Garrett, 2004). For others, like Ayan and Erica, engaging in physical activity to acquire physical gains was encouraging. "Cause lifting weights, that's gonna help everything... I wanna get bigger thighs and everything like that". Erica also gave her reasons for engaging in physical activity "I exercised to tone my body and to like lose weight in certain places". They were motivated by the idea that their physical appearances would be improved (Wright, O'Flynn & MacDonald, 2006). Although they do not explicitly say that they have set these goals to look good for boys in particular, research would say that young women constantly feel the burden "to construct and present their bodies in a way which they assume is pleasing to boys" (Evans, 2006, p. 557). Yet they also discussed not liking being watched when they are exercising.

Surveillance of the Body

Ayan described scenarios when her body was on display and the attention that it drew from the males in her surroundings. In the first scenario, the surveillance she perceived she would receive deterred her from engaging in activity. She described that taking part in a pick-up basketball game with mostly boys was unsettling for her. She felt as though because she was the only female in the space, there were high expectations for her to perform and that she would be watched closely by spectators and other players, "If you're the girl there in the room, you know everyone's looking at you...It makes me feel a little uncomfortable". Evans (2006) would argue that the combination of both being perceived as lacking competence and seeming masculine instead of performing femininity during physical activity is the main reason why young women do not like being watched, especially by boys. That being said, young women who are highly confident in their physical skills are less likely to object playing sports or games with boys or be watched by boys (Evans, 2006) and such was the case with Carla in this study. Ayan described a second scenario in a different context when she had caught males in the weight room look her way. Even though she cared substantially about being attractive, onlookers, males in particular, make her feel uncomfortable. She spoke about having to be careful and strategic in regards to

the clothing she wore in weight rooms because people staring at her was bothersome, “some people are really annoying... you kinda become the center of attention”. She also felt objectified by the males gawking her way which made her feel unsafe “cause some boys are like that”. Clark (2018) argues that this kind of staring conveys dominance and places the recipient in a subordinate position and also supports a hierarchy of social structures and in this case, gender.

Digital Media Platforms and the Body

Many of the young women in this study discussed having a presence on social media, particularly on Instagram and Snapchat where they post their own photos and follow other users. Two of the young women discussed following fitness models on these platforms for inspiration to work on their own bodies. This included transformation videos of people’s weight loss journeys. According to Beltran-Carrillo, Devis-Devis and Peiro-Velert, (2018) “body transformations through physical activity seem to play a special role in the decisions that our adolescent participants made to engage in or drop out” (p. 9). However, they would choose to unfollow these accounts if they noticed that their fitness journeys of these fitness models were not sincere but fake because of plastic surgery. Both girls discussed fitness models with “real bodies” and how those accounts were worth continuing to follow for inspiration in their own fitness journeys. “I look at girls’ whose bodies look real to me ... it really motivates me cause they look, they look nice you know”. Ayan also remarked that these fitness models received a lot of attention, which was something that she considered to be one of her reasons for her participation in physical activity.

Mass or social media culture has the power to school bodies because it renders visible depictions of desirable, ideal and feminine bodies (Garrett, 2004). Yet, it has been found that the images on social media that young women are exposed to can entice encouragement and happiness but also anxiety and dissatisfaction (Rich, 2018). This technology tempts young women to monitor and judge the appearance of theirs and other’s bodies (Rich, 2018). As they interact and consume health-related content on these platforms they enact practices that are detrimental to their conceptions of what a healthy body is (Lupton, 2015). This has the potential to further marginalize those, in the physical activity context, to increase surveillance and social exclusion (Pang et al., 2018). There is concern

that young people do not have the capacity to navigate health related content on social media and therefore, they may not engage with the content in an emotionally safe way (Goodyear et al., 2019).

Evans (2006) insists that education is required to inspire adolescents to resist pressure to conform to images accessible in media which focuses on physical activity as a tool for achieving the model, healthy, attractive body.

Summary

This chapter further analyzed the findings of the experiences underserved young women have with physical activity. Many of the constraints and supports identified by the young women, both within the physical education context and out-of-school context were similar to previous studies. As was expected, the young women experienced more constraints than supports. The community center in particular was a crucial organizational form of support for their engagement in formal and informal physical activity, which also fostered a sense of belonging and safety. With the support from their friends, these participants found ways to move their bodies in ways that felt best for them. Whether that was dancing, playing manhunt or shooting hoops, each of the participants moved and expended energy in ways viable to them while resisting persistent and unwavering barriers they faced each day.

The last chapter will summarize the ways in which this research contributes to existing literature, and be applied to sport and recreation development in underserved communities. Directions for future research will also be discussed.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the preceding chapter I analyzed five in-depth semi-structured interviews of six underserved young women's experiences with physical activity. Five themes were identified as key shaping influences in their narratives. In this chapter, I begin by discussing the contribution of these narratives to existing scholarship and some of the policy implications which flow from this before gesturing toward directions for future research.

Conclusions

The young women in this study lead complex lives influenced by social, cultural and political factors that shape their access to and opportunities in life including physical activity (Wright & MacDonald, 2010; Wyn & White, 1997). They recognize the neoliberal condition to self-manage their own health and wellbeing so that they can be productive and contributing citizens (MacDonald, 2011; O'Flynn, 2010). The findings revealed that most of the young women experienced a sense of guilt, deficiency, and a need to improve themselves in light of their failure to meet neoliberal imperatives. This caused them stress and exacerbated a pressure to resolve this problem so that they could move forward and be 'ideal' neoliberal citizens. This is deserving of attention because these young women are underserved and underserved young women have less opportunities to engage in physical activity than their counterparts in affluent communities and less opportunities than the young men in their own communities (Sabo, 2009). They are not in a position to be able to fulfil these neoliberal imperatives, especially on their own.

Implications for recreation professionals, policy makers and teachers are twofold. First, because school boards in this province are choosing 'out-of-class' models of for physical education at the high school level, students are expected to accumulate hours of physical activity outside the physical education context. This policy furthers the inequity already experienced by underserved young people. This model is not ideal for young women such as the ones in this study as it potentially sets them up for failure. These expectations from government and schools is not realistic as we know that these young women experience many

constraints in their underserved community context. Policy makers and teachers need to reconsider how this model impacts underserved young women and work with recreational professionals on creating opportunities to increase access to physical activity outside of school. Second, the literature is dense with panic from professionals who worry about inactive young people (Sallis, 2000; Hohepa et al., 2004). These professionals often interpret adolescent physical inactivity as a problem that must be addressed by strategies to increase young people's participation in physical activity (Wright, MacDonald et al., 2005). As findings revealed, these young women are choosing not to make physical activity a top priority because of other commitments, like performing well in school. Yet, lack of participation in physical activity frames young people as delinquent (Wright et al., 2003). Professionals must remember that adolescence represents a phase of development and that constant messages about being delinquents for their lack of engagement in physical activity is sending the wrong message. Instead of generating feelings of deviancy for not conforming to neoliberal ideals, professionals should focus on physical activity as something to be enjoyed, rather than as a vehicle for meeting certain healthist criteria (Quarmby, 2013).

Several of the supports and constraints that young women in my cohort experienced resonate with those regularly reported in existing literature. These include supportive factors such as having the company of peers to engage with and also having a choice about what kind of physical activity to participate in (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Azzarito et al., 2006; Gibbons & Humbert, 2008; Yungblut et al., 2012; O'Sullivan & MacPhail, 2010; Hill, 2015). However, there are also key matters that were experienced differently by my study participants. First was the extent of parental support received by the young women in my study. Parents or guardians have been found to be an important form of support for young people's engagement and sustainment in physical activity (Thompson et al, 2005; Quarmby & Dagkas, 2010; Quarmby, 2013). Yet the young women in my cohort, with the exception of Carla, did not regard their parents or guardians as having any influence over their participation. A second impactful form of support was the role of the community recreational center in their neighbourhood. The center was found to be a central organizational space where the young women would spend a lot of time because of the variety of options they had while there

and also the company of their peers. The huge amount of time they spent at the center was reflective of a sense of belonging. In so saying, participants also identified that a significant barrier to their participation in physical activity was the cost incurred. Even though programming at the center was barrier free and cost nothing to the participants, Bernie understood that without funding from government or private donors, there would be no programming for her at the center. Carla also understands that without the help of the staff at the center looking for funds to support her elite basketball career, she would not be playing basketball at the capacity in which she is. Another barrier identified within the community center was the male-dominated culture in the gymnasium that turned the young women away from taking part in pick-up basketball or other team games. Moving forward, this research should be used to inform policy makers and community stakeholders of the impact that community centers and their programming can have for underserved young women, in particular, and how it can benefit the community as a whole. For disadvantaged women, barrier-free community-based programming can make a significant difference in their engagement in physical activity (Wright, Harwood et al., 2005). Due to their positioning as ‘at-risk’ individuals (Williams et al., 2009), their willingness to keep busy by engaging in community-based physical activity programming such as the drop-in program, is demonstrative of resiliency and resistance to the negative influences that surrounds them in their neighbourhood (Martinek & Hellison, 1997). With further funding, recreation professionals at the community center, can focus on providing quality programming informed by the young women themselves. This could include female-only timeslots in the gymnasium with programming that is not entirely focused on structured physical activity. Rather, programming would reflect the informal kinds of physical activity they indicated as enjoyable, and also designed to offer the young women with a range of choices and agency in their physical experiences. Since the young women enjoyed spending time at the community center but still identified barriers within the programs, those invested in the health and wellness of young women should consider funding a female only youth committee. This kind of committee would give the young women a voice in their physical activity pursuits in the community setting while also collaborating with their peers.

Other findings that contribute to understanding of the lived experiences underserved young women have with physical activity include the conditions of the neighbourhood like the lack of safety, its lack of aesthetic beauty and the poor health-related behaviours of community members. Like James and Embrey's (2001) or Clark's (2015) studies, young women feared being attacked and therefore avoided engaging in physical activity in outdoor spaces like parks. The presence of gangs was also a concern for them. Sometimes, this caused them to feel too frightened and anxious to walk to the community center to take part in the programming. The lack of attractiveness in the outdoor space was also a deterrent for being physically active. Finding rubbish on sidewalks made the idea of going for a jog unappealing to Erica. She also discussed that if she lived in a neighbourhood that was more attractive, she would be motivated to go outdoors more often. Danika in particular found motivation from observing others engage in physical activity, but found that the people in her neighbourhood did not do that. Rather, she engaged in the behaviours she did observe, believed to be "unproductive" in society. Clearly, a lot needs to be addressed in the outdoor space of the neighbourhood. Implications include, again, securing funding for the community center programs and initiatives, that aims to erode a culture that supports violence against women and "risk discourse" with violence prevention programs young women (James & Embrey, 2001, p.51). The intended outcome of these programs is empowering these young women to build skills and confidence so that they can feel safer in their neighbourhood which can lead to increasing their physical activity levels. Without funding, however, these programs are not always viable.

Findings also revealed that the young women both resisted and reinforced gender discourses. Previous research demonstrated that young women challenge gendered notions in physical activity contexts (Flintoff & Scraton, 2001; Azzarito & Solmon, 2005; Fisette, 2013). Resistance was apparent when Carla talked about choosing to take part in pick-up basketball in the male-dominated gymnasium and not letting her female identity stop her. Bernie showed some resistance when she spontaneously organized herself and peers to play a game of manhunt in the middle of the night, a risk not commonly taken by females because risk discourse frames young women as vulnerable (Clark, 2015). Ayan demonstrated resistance

when she decided to exercise in a weight room, a space constructed as “risky” for young women because the “public gaze” that can draw a sense of embarrassment and scrutiny of their bodies (Evans, 2006; Azzarito & Hill, 2013). This study adds valuable insight into the ways that young women challenge gender discourse that impacts their experiences with physical activity. These findings contribute to literature by adding evidence that young women can and do resist gender discourse and exercise their agency in a variety of ways because they enjoy being active in diverse ways. This contrasts with the ways in which young women are often depicted in scholarly literature, as not interested in being physically active.

Contrarily, the findings also revealed that these young women reinforced gender stereotypes. They recognized and made concessions to accommodate normative gender expectations. Ayan believed that her female peers are uninterested in physical activity and do not regard it as important. While Erica drove the point home when she said that as a female, she felt as though it was not as important for her as it was for a male. She also explained that watching a women’s professional basketball game would be boring because they cannot perform certain skills like professional men do. These young women also positioned themselves as inferior to young men by internalizing the idea a male’s skill set and knowledge about physical activity was superior to theirs. These gendered concepts negatively impact the young women’s engagement and their perceived competency and unfortunately, these stereotypes persist in physical education and other physical activity context (Azzarito & Solmon, 2009; Hill, 2015). Work needs to be done to support young women in resisting normativity. Young women would benefit from further research with a focus on strategies that physical education teachers, students, recreation professionals can use to help young women resist these gendered stereotypes and also support them in realizing that they have the power to construct their own physical identities (Hill, 2015).

The young women also positioned their bodies as central to physical activity. Many of the participants’ reasoning for engaging in physical activity was to achieve a particular physical aesthetic. The ways their bodies looked was important to their physical identities. The ways their body looked both enabled and disabled their inclinations to participate. Danika felt she was not ‘fit’ enough to take part in activities while Ayan and Erica engaged in weight lifting with the

intention of ‘toning’ their bodies to achieve a particular aesthetic result. Still, these young women were uncomfortable when being watched engaging in activity and disliked the attention. Research suggest this may be due to both the fear of being perceived as lacking competence and not appearing feminine by male audiences (Evans, 2006).

The young women discussed having a presence on social media platforms, and following content posted by fitness models for inspiration and motivation. What is concerning is that images on social media that young women are exposed to can be inspiring and produce happy feelings but they can also be a source of anxiety and dissatisfaction (Rich, 2018). This technology allows them to consume all sorts of unregulated health-related content which causes them to monitor and judge their own bodies, enacting practices that are possibly detrimental to their health (Lupton, 2015). It has been suggested that relevant adults should help young people critically think about the health-related content they see on social media (Goodyear et al., 2019). Seeing as these young women are barely supported by their parents and guardians in their physical activity pursuits, relevant adults for these young women most likely include teachers and recreation workers. It would be ideal if physical education and health teachers or recreation/ youth workers had the capacity to address “smart” consuming of health-related content on the array of digital platforms young people interact with in their class rooms or drop-in programming. Physical education and health curriculums in schools need to address this issue if young women are to feel good about their bodies and increase their participation in physical activity.

Implications for Future Research

Comprehending the perspectives of underserved young women’s lived experiences with physical activity is a step closer towards developing appropriate opportunities and enhanced experiences for them. This thesis project investigated first-hand and in-depth experiences of underserved young women, presented by using their own words. For professionals working with young women who are underserved or at-risk, it is integral to consider the priorities of young women at this point in their lives, their support systems, constraints, the impact of gender norms, and the impact of social media and other discursive material they are exposed to on a daily basis in all its complexity.

It has been suggested that there is no universal solution to the lack of interest of girls in PE context (Oliver & Kirk, 2016), rather focus should be about what can be done for specific young women in specific contexts (Metcalf, 2018, p. 682). Further research needs to focus on how spaces, like community recreational centers, can better serve underserved young women. The participants of this research indicated that the community center was an integral form of support for their participation in physical activity, still, barriers within the community center were identified. Therefore, through collaboration with the underserved young women who take part in the programming at the center, an evaluation of the current physical activity programming and culture of the center should be conducted to improve access and opportunities. Accessing and responding to participant voices is relevant for community sport programmers as they can develop physical activity programs that are meaningful and drive a sense of purpose to the participants themselves (Oliver, 2010; Fisette, 2013). Young people also benefit from research when their voices are used to investigate the phenomenon affecting them directly. Too often, adults formulate programs that dismiss the participants from the development of curricular decision making, execution and sense of ownership of their learning and movement experiences (Oliver, 2010).

There was, and continues to be, a need for underserved young women's voices to be at the fore of research exploring their physical activity experiences. Future research should focus on *what might be* as a replacement for *what is* (Oliver, 2010, p. 40). An activist approach to help them realize *what could be* (Oliver, 2010). Given that girls become more engaged in physical activity programs when they are consulted and given a choice (Mitchell, Gray, & Inchley, 2015) a further step would be to make them part of the programming process via an activist approach (Lamb et al., 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this thesis was to provide an insight into the lived experiences underserved young women have with physical activity. The voices of this particular group of young women are seldom sought in physical activity research. Though only six voices were heard, and some findings were similar to other young women in the research literature, they also differently experience

other significant forms supports and constraints representative of their experiences as young women situated in an underserved community.

Other findings showed that although they find physical activity to be ‘fun’, rewarding and identity forming, they are not always able to prioritize being active as they face several constraints, but still they feel as though they are lacking and delinquent. Underserved young women should not be homogenized and policy makers and teachers must consider the wider circumstance of their lives as underserved young people and create equitable opportunities, if they are expected to be ‘ideal’ citizens.

Importantly, their engagement in physical activity can be interpreted as a means to an end or strategy for resiliency. This is why it is vital to continue to fund and improve the programming at the community center in their neighbourhood, and also convince schoolboards to incorporate educational components to their physical education and health curriculums to address gender norms, and consuming health-related media.

This study contributes to a gap in the literature calling for increased understanding of the experiences underserved young women have with physical activity. Their voices offer direct insight into the place and meaning of the social phenomenon of physical activity in their lives.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer



Participants Needed!!

Student researcher Meghan, is looking for female youth who want to participate in a research study. Meghan wants to know about how you experience sport, recreation and exercise around your neighbourhood!

Participation would be in the form of an interview, about 30-45 minutes long.

Interview questions include:

- What does physical activity mean to you?
- What types of physical activity do you do in your neighbourhood?
- What types of physical activity do you do with your friends?
- Does being a female affect the way you participate in physical activity?



Seeking young women in [REDACTED] to be part of a research study about physical activity!

If you are a young woman between the ages of 13-20, live close to the [REDACTED], and is interested in being a research participant, talk to [REDACTED] at the [REDACTED]!

Appendix B: Institutional Consent

INSTITUTIONAL CONSENT FORM

The Place and Meaning of Physical Culture in the Lives of Female Youth in a Canadian Inner-city Neighbourhood

Primary Researcher: Meghan Lemoine (University of Waikato)
mm116@students.waikato.ac.nz, telephone: [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor: Lisette Burrows (University of Waikato)
lisette.burrows@waikato.ac.nz

Project overview:

This project seeks to discover how female youth in a Canadian inner-city neighbourhood experience physical culture in its widest sense (sports, recreation, exercise, walking to school etc.). Physical activity experiences are widely linked in professional and public literature to health outcomes, yet little is known about how physical activity shapes these outcomes for young women.

I am asking that you consider granting consent for the primary researcher, Meghan Lemoine, to conduct research during your organization's youth drop-in program. In accordance with the University of Waikato's Human Research Ethics Committee, informed consent from the participants will be sought.

I hope that the organization's executives will allow me to recruit 6 to 8 female identifying youth between the ages of 13-20 enrolled in the youth programs at your organization to engage in semi-structured interviews individually or in pairs (copy of questions enclosed). Participants will be asked to recall details of their experiences with physical activity and also reflect on the place, meaning and role of those experiences in their lives. Interested participants, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed by their parent or guardian (copy enclosed) and returned to the primary researcher (Meghan Lemoine) prior to the interview process.

If approval is granted, participants will complete the interview in the multi-purpose room (MPR) of the community center or in an alternative quiet setting where their participation in the research can be anonymous and confidential. I would like to conduct the interviews during the youth drop-in times (6:30pm-8:30pm, Monday – Friday) or on weekends at an agreed upon time with the participant. The interview process should take no longer than 30 to 60 minutes each. No costs will be incurred by either your organization, or the individual participants.

When writing the thesis paper, the names of individuals or organizations involved will not be used, but rather a pseudonym or generalized term will be used. The name of the organization will simply be replaced by 'community-based organization' and the space will be referred to as the 'community centre'.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and to allow the researcher to have access to recruit participants from your organization's youth programs. In no way does this waive your legal rights or release the researcher of their legal and professional responsibilities. Your organization is free to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice or consequence.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that

time. You may contact me at my email address mm116@students.waikato.ac.nz, or by telephone at



If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct these interviews/study at your institution.

Approved by:

Print your name and title here

Signature

Date

Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

The Place and Meaning of Physical Culture in the Lives of Female Youth in a Canadian Inner-city Neighbourhood

I have read the **Information Sheet** and have had the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

Please check the box beside each statement to ensure understanding:

- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw at any time, and my data can be withdrawn up until 3 weeks after the return of transcripts.
- ☐ I understand that I can decline to answer any particular question in the study.
- ☐ I understand that I can refuse discussion on any issue.
- ☐ I understand that I can refuse the recording of any part, or whole, or the interview.
- ☐ After having read the transcript, I have the right to request the erasure or amendment of any record with which I am comfortable.
- ☐ I understand that the researcher will keep all records from the interview confidential.
- ☐ I understand that all data will be kept in a safe place for at least 5 years according to the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations.
- ☐ I consent to the data being used for Meghan's thesis. I understand that any use of the audio recordings, will not take place without permission from me.
- ☐ I understand that my name will not be used in Meghan's thesis, and that the researcher will do everything possible to keep my identity anonymous/hidden.
- ☐ I understand that if I have any concerns, I can contact the primary researcher.

Please complete details below:

Name: _____

Age: _____

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Please select one option:

- ☐ I would like an emailed copy of my transcribed interview
_____ email address
- ☐ I would like a hard copy of my transcribed interview

Parent/ Guardian signature:

Print: _____ Signature: _____

Researcher signature:

Print: _____ Signature: _____

Appendix D: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

The Place and Meaning of Physical Culture in the Lives of Female Youth in a Canadian Inner-city Neighbourhood

Primary Researcher: Meghan Lemoine (University of Waikato)

mm116@students.waikato.ac.nz, telephone: [REDACTED]

Research Supervisor: Lisette Burrows (University of Waikato) lisette.burrows@waikato.ac.nz

My name is Meghan Lemoine, I am a student at the University of Waikato (in New Zealand). But I decided to do a big project that involves doing research here in [REDACTED], and I will be the researcher. I used to work at the [REDACTED], but now I am just studying. I am inviting you to take part in a research study as a participant. This letter will give you an idea about what I am researching and how you can help if you choose to participate. Please read this letter carefully. If there is anything you don't understand, please ask your parent or your guardian to contact me (email/cell posted above).

Why am I conducting this study?

I am doing this study to learn more about the experiences that female youth, who live in the city's core, have with recreation, sport and exercise. Physical activity is very important. I am interested in your personal experiences and opinion about topics such as:

- What does physical activity mean to you? How do you define it for yourself?
- What types of physical activity do you do in your neighbourhood?
- What types of physical activity do you do with your friends?
- Does being a female affect the way you participate in physical activity?

What will happen?

If you choose to be a part of this study, you must agree, but your parents also have to agree and sign the consent form. I will contact you to be a part of one individual interview. The interview will be about 30-60 minutes long. The interview will take place at the community centre. If you want, you can have a friend or family member with you when you do the interview. You can ask questions any time, now or later. You can ask me via phone or email.

Who will know what I did in the study?

Any information you give the researcher will be kept confidential (secret). The researcher will not show anyone else the information collected from you. The researcher will write a report but no one will know who said what because your name will not be used in the report. This is to protect you.

Do you have to be in the study?

You do not have to be in the study. If you do not want to be part of the study, just say so to the researcher (Meghan). We will also ask your parent or guardian if they would like for you to be in the study. Even if your parent or guardian wants you to be in the study, you can still say no. Even if you say yes now, you can change your mind later. If you decide to take part and later decide you want to leave the study, you are free to do this at any time. This is totally your choice.

Transcribed Interview

When your interview is done, the researcher will type out everything that was said during the interviews. You will be given a copy of this and you will have 3 weeks to look over it with your parent or guardian if you want to make any changes. You can make as many changes as you want and if you read something in the transcript and do not want it to be used, you can take it out completely so it will never be used.

Appendix E: Interview Questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introductions

- Welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.
- How has your day been? Did anything exciting happen?
- My role as a researcher, what I am studying and why.

Check consent forms, remind her that the interview will be audio recorded but nothing to be nervous about, were just having a conversation. Remind her that at any point she can refuse to answer a question or stop the interview. Also remind her that she can have a support person present if she'd like.

Questions are semi-structured to allow for other topic appropriate questions to come up naturally.

Questions will include:

- What does physical activity mean to you? How do you define it for yourself?
- Can you tell me about a time you participated in physical activity? What other ways have you participated in physical activity?
- What are the different ways you would like to participate in physical activity? Are there physical activities that you've never tried but would like to? Why haven't you yet?
- What types of physical activity do you do with your family? Where do you engage in physical activity together?
- What do your parents or guardians say about physical activity? Why do you think they think these things?
- What types of physical activity do you do with your friends? How do your friends influence the types of physical activity you chose to do?
- What types of physical activity do you do in your community? Which spaces in the neighbourhood do you like (or not) to do physical activity?
- Does being a female affect the way you participate in physical activity? How do you think boys experience physical activity differently from a girl?
- How do you decide which activities you engage in, and which you don't?
- What is it that motivates you to participate in physical activity? How do you motivate yourself to go and do physical activity?

- Is there a main reason you engage in physical activity?
- How confident are you to do physical activity? How important is it for you to improve your physical activity skills?
- How can physical activity be better for you?
- Is there a particular setting where you'd like to learn new things? Who is there?
- What do you think about young women who play in sports or exercise? Do you think it's different for young men?
- Do you think physical activity should be a priority for young women? Why or why not?
- What role does physical activity have in your life?
- How important is it to you, that you do physical activity to be healthy?
- Is physical activity something that you value? Is it important to you? Why do you feel this way?
- How do you feel when you engage in physical activity alone? How do you feel when you engage in physical activity with others? How do you feel when you engage in physical activity at the community center?
- How does your attitude change after you engage in physical activity?
- Where do you learn about physical activity? Do you see or hear a lot of information? How do you think it influences your thoughts about physical activity?
- How does media impact your ideas about physical activity? Which type of media?
- When you think about role models, who comes to mind?
- Reflecting on everything you just said, overall how do you feel about physical activity now?

Thank you, your participation in this research is greatly appreciated. Remind her that she will receive a copy of the transcribed interview that she can look over and take anything out if she wants to. She has three weeks to inform the researcher of this.